

Woof Woof Story

I TOLD YOU TO TURN ME INTO A
Pampered Pooch.

NOT FENRIR!

6

Inumajin

ILLUSTRATION BY

Kochimo







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Aruru

"Humans are all the same... It seems they don't understand just how grand you truly are, Lord Routa."

Zenobia

Mircalla

"When is this meeting going to start anyway?"

"We need to make the first strike this time, before the enemies have a chance to reawaken!"

Routa

It's time we discuss how to defeat the Demon Lord's army!



Elizabeth

"Hee-hee.
Okay."

Mary

"Let's
stay up
all night
talking!
I'm not
letting
you get
any sleep
tonight!"



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Inumajin

ILLUSTRATION BY

Kochimo

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ON
NEW YORK

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Woof Woof Story

I TOLD YOU TO TURN ME INTO A *Pampered Pooch*, NOT FENRIR!

VOLUME 6

Inumajin

Translation by Andrew Prowse

Cover art by Kochimo

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WANWAN MONOGATARI Volume 6 -KANEMOCHI NO INU
NI SHITETOWA ITTAGA, FENRIR NISHIROTOWA
ITTENEE!-

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Nothing was sharper than that cursed blade.

It could glide through iron and shave off thin slices of diamond.

And now that magical sword was unleashing all its incredible power.

“Fwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!! Take this! Take that! Tell me: How does it feel to yield to my blade?! Does it frustrate you?! Eh? Does it madden you?!”

Glistening purple, the white blade flashed and flashed again, each time smoothly slicing through everything it touched.

With every swing, a voice resounded, its laughter thick with rapture.

“Heh-heh-heh! How pathetic you look! You’ll know what it means to be carved up, fresh, only to be softly plated and topped with a nice acidic nutrient-rich dressing!! It’s what you deserve!”

The voice’s owner roared with laughter at the completion of this task.

“Arwf... (Someone’s in an awfully good mood...)”

Tucked in a corner of the kitchen, I sigh at the loud laughter.

My gaze is on a heaping salad. A pile of vegetables sits on

a large dish, fresh and juicy, water droplets snapping off it.

"And done," announces the master of the kitchen, an older man named James, putting down the knife in his hand.

The previous shouts do not belong to the old man using the knife, however.

No. That voice belongs to the knife itself, which—or *who*—just finished its work.

"You're a sharp one. Vegetables have never looked more alive. And you show no signs of ever dulling. No... In fact, you seem to be getting sharper with each cut...!"

"Heh-heh-heh. So you do understand. My new servant... I, and only I, am the ultimate magic sword Belgor! Dicing, slicing, quartering—I care not what method we use! Bring the cuts on! With you, I will slice through any ingredients they can throw at us with grace!"

"Arf...? (Is that really enough for you, 'ultimate magic sword'...?)"

The knife is actually a magicked blade that drained the lives of many while in control of the Hero's mind. More accurately, it's a demon who was possessing the Hero's sword before Hecate stole his power; now he's being used in the mansion as a kitchen knife.

"Now I know for certain! In the history of all my servants, it is you who are the most talented! You have mastered the blade in all its facets, from its base to its tip, not depending on strength but using skill! A stark difference from those false Heroes who wielded me, merely relying on the sword's capabilities to do their job for them! One thousand years since I was sealed away—and for the first time, I have learned the bliss of being truly swung!"

The old man's skills are apparently greater than those of generations of Heroes. Just what I'd expect from him—a phrase I feel like I've been using a lot. Still, it's not as though he'll ever be using those skills in battle. If the magic sword is satisfied with his current station, then all is well.

"Ahh, I can't get enough! How long until we receive

more ingredients, my servant?! I can yet function!"

Truly a remark unthinkable from Belgor, the ambassador of hell, formerly a general in the Demon Lord's army. Supposedly, he was a wicked demon bent on wiping out humanity, but it appears he's all but forgotten that role and now finds joy in life as a knife.

"Arf, arf... (Well, just as long as the mansion is at peace and he doesn't get in the way of my comfy pet life...)"

The salad, incidentally, isn't a meal for Papa or my lady, but for the maidservants. We may not have many here in the mansion, but there are still almost ten. It's all on one big plate for efficiency's sake—this way, they can all split it up themselves.

"Chef, I'll bring this over! Toa, grab that side!"

"Y-yes, ma'am!"

After entering the kitchen, Betty, the energetic maid, and Toa, the one with black twin tails, put the big plate of salad onto a cart and wheel it away.

"Right, and I'll be done once I plate the rest," says James after them. "I'll bring it over myself so you can start eating before me."

"Heh-heh-heh. With our powers combined, my servant, even food for so many becomes nothing more than a bunch of little chopped-up pieces in an instant!"

Belgor talks about it joyously, but it seems the old man can't hear his voice. James begins humming and putting the rest of the food on plates.

"Arf, arf. (I guess he wouldn't be able to stay sane if he had to listen to that rackety laughter every time he used the knife.)"

Even if Belgor *did* plot something untoward, the old man would never be brainwashed since he can't hear him.

With that, all the fuss concerning the Hero is settled.

"Arrrrwww... (Feels good to take a nap on another peaceful day...)"

Having finished my lunch earlier than the old man and

the others, I decide to idle my time away in comfortable contentedness.

I rest my head on my bushy tail and close my now-heavy eyelids.

"Arrrw. (Good night.)"

"Hey, don't go to sleep. Get up."

I hear an intimidating voice from above me.

"Arf? (Excuse you? Who was that? I was just about to idle my time away in comfortable contentedness.)"

"I thought something was strange when you never showed up... I've been waiting for you ever since I hurried through my meal, you know."

The swordswoman Zenobia, her blazing red hair aflutter, stands there with her hands on her hips. For some reason, she seems ticked off.

"Arf, arf. (Now, now. Anger is bad for your digestion, Zenobia. Let's just take a nap together. Here, I'll scoot over for you.)"

And if you want to use me as a body pillow, all the better.

"I said, don't go to sleep! We talked about having a meeting to go over future plans today!"

Huh? That's news to me!

"Why...you..."

As I give a blank look, Zenobia glares at me, veins popping out of her temples.

"Squeak. (Ah, yes, she did talk about that, didn't she? You were half-asleep at the time, milord, which is likely why you do not remember.)"

As I sleepily rub my eyes, Len pokes out of my mane.

"Squeak? (It was all about how the Demon Lord's generals are only reviving near this mansion, remember?)"

Ah well.

It's annoying to think about, but all three of the ones who have revived so far have done so in the forest close to the mansion. The occurrences keep getting me wrapped up in battles I don't want to fight, all to protect my peaceful pet

lifestyle.

And to make matters worse, my true identity has been revealed to Zenobia. I was scared that this time she'd tear me apart for sure, but after she got a synopsis from Hecate, she actually seems to have become our ally instead.

But why is Zenobia so zealous about this? We should just laze around forever as fellow NEETs.

"Squeak, squeak. *(It's only natural the girl would be so passionate. She has been entrusted with the defense of the mansion, albeit half-intentionally on her part. And to best defend it, she suggested that we gather up all those who know what's happening to exchange information and prepare for the next enemy's coming.)*"

Oh? Zenobia, you really are eager. I have to say, insisting you'll protect the mansion—that takes wonderful pluck.

I expect good things from you. Keep that enthusiasm up and protect everyone at the mansion, including me, the pet.

"You're *literally* our most powerful resource! What are you acting so carefree for?!"

"A-arrrrwf! *(N-no, stop it! Don't pull on it like thaaaaat! You'll pull my collar oooooffff!!)*"

Zenobia snatches my red collar—the symbol of my pet-ness—and drags me away.

How could you count a mere pet as part of your combat power? That's just tyrannical! Don't you have the kindness in your heart to protect a cute little puppy like me?

"Squeak, squeak. *(The sheer gall to call yourself a cute puppy... It is amazing, in a manner of speaking.)*"

"Woof, woof! *(Hey! What are you talking about, Len? No matter how you look at me, I am a cute little puppy! Wait a minute, Zenobia! You can't just drag a reluctant dog out for a walk! That's cruelty! I'll tell on you to my lady about this animal abuse!)*"

Well, I could tell on her, but my lady has never once understood a word I've said.

"Don't give me that *woof woof* crap! I already know

you're Fenrir, the Fen Wolf King! Lady Hecate herself told me! You think pretending to be a dog will work on *me*?!"

"Rrrgggh!! (*I am a dog, I am!! And even if I am the Fen Wolf King, Fenrir, I'm still a really cute Fenrir who is only a few months old!!*)"

I desperately struggle against Zenobia as she tugs on my collar.

The old man, who has grown accustomed to seeing things like this, finishes his cooking without appearing to pay any attention to us and sets the plates onto a wheeled cart.

"I don't know what you two are up to, but that one's been steadily polishing his eat-sleep-repeat habit recently. Would you mind taking him for a walk or something?"

Zenobia bows to the old man as he leaves the kitchen. "Yes, Lord James, leave it to me. Just you watch—I'll beat the laziness right out of this creature!"

What's wrong with a pet doing nothing but eating and sleeping?! Nooo! Meetings are awful! I don't want to go to a *meeting*!

You're exceeding your authority! If you want me to do something, you must go through my owner first!

"Ugh! Just get over here!"

"Yip! (*Lady Mary! Help me! Help meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*)"



In the end, I was dog-napped from the mansion against my will and brought to the elves' village in the forest.

It's the perfect place to talk about things without being overheard by the people at the mansion who know nothing about the Demon Lord's army.

"Oh, Lord Routa, you look so tired... You poor thing..."

Aruru, the eldest of the elf sisters and the current village administrator, embraces my exhausted self and strokes me.

When she does, Zenobia, who dragged me all this way, levels a sharp glare at me.

Even under her scrutiny, though, Aruru doesn't forget to give me head pats. "Humans are all the same...", she says. "It seems they don't understand just how grand you truly are, Lord Rوتا."

"How foolish humans are for not understanding how wondrous the king is."

"Yeah, the king's really great!"

"That's right. All we have now is ours thanks to the king."

"The king is strong and kind—he is our divine protector."

The sisters gather, even Iruru and Oruru, and they start brushing me and feeding me snacks. Oh, that tastes good.





“Even...,” stammers Zenobia. “Even the elves have been spoiling him like this? No wonder he got so fat.”

H-how did you figure it out? That I come here all the time to get waited on?

“How careless and negligent can you *be*?! If something happened, do you really think you’d be able to do anything about it like this?!”

“Arf, arf! (*B-but I’m so slim now!*)”

Gaze upon this beautiful body, utterly devoid of superfluous flesh!

Of course, it’s the power of the shape-shifting technique maintaining my form... I’m way too scared to think about it to dispel the technique now...

“When is this meeting going to *start* anyway? I had to sneak away during our meal for this, you know. I did make sure to force down the tomato salad, of course!”

Folding her arms and complaining is a blond maid—the vampire princess Carmilla, formerly one of the Demon Lord’s generals.

Like Belgor, who was sealed in a knife, she too has had her powers stolen, having morphed from a woman with a very sproingy figure into a little girl who looks good with a two-sided updo. Her lust for blood is gone, and now the *tsundere* maid loves fresh tomatoes more than the blood of virgins.

“As meals are luxuries for us, it does not pose much of an issue, but I have work this afternoon as well, so I would very much appreciate it if we finished this quickly...”

Taking his monocle off to wipe off the grime is the necromancer Lich, also a former general in the Demon Lord’s army. Like the maid, he’s doing brisk work as a servant.

“Even my eyes couldn’t possibly have identified Lady Mircalla and Lord Richmond as Demon Lord’s army generals...,” murmurs Zenobia.

Actually, those eyes of yours are blinder than you think.

Of course, maybe you're less blind than the others at the mansion since you were the first who caught on to *my* identity.

"I'd heard you'd both had a change of heart, but can I really trust you...?" she continues. "Isn't the very fact that two generals from the Demon Lord's army are living at the mansion a danger unto itself?"

More accurately, it's *three*. I bet the other one is currently busy being delighted as the old man cares for and cleans him.

"Hmph!" sniffs Mircalla. "It's not like we're working there because we *like* it or anything!"

No, you *definitely* seem like you're satisfied with your maid lifestyle. I always see you around with that group of three, practically whistling while you work.

"What...? Then why are you staying so long at the mansion?!" Zenobia barks. "You'd better not be plotting anything evil!"

Mircalla's words were a *tsundere* cliché, but Zenobia is thickheaded and so she seems to have taken them at face value. She rests a hand on her sword's hilt and directs a sharp glare at Mircalla, who flinches.

"Wh-wh-what do you want?! A fight?! Well, you'll have your fight! With the king here, that is!" Mircalla hides behind me, bares her teeth, hisses, and threatens Zenobia.

Wait. Please don't rely on me. You combined with the elf girls now clinging to me make me look like a tree that grows beautiful women.

"Please calm down, Lady Zenobia," Richmond says soothingly. "With our powers stolen, we have only the strength of normal humans. We haven't even enough to commit any evil deeds. Were you not convinced by what the Lady Witch explained to you?"

"Mgh..."

With Richmond being the voice of reason, Zenobia groans. His powers of persuasion are doubled thanks to his

old and mature butler image. He's such a stylish gentleman now, you'd never think he used to be an enormous bone giant.

"You needn't worry. In the unlikely event that they rebel, the Fen Wolves will waste no time hunting them down and killing them. You should have no complaints then. Human, you keep watch inside the mansion. We shall keep a watchful eye outside it."

That declaration comes from Garo, currently in her human form, leaning against the Worldtree. Despite her black hair, golden eyes, and essentially naked state, strangely, she doesn't come off as seductive. Perhaps it's because of how awe-inspiring she is on the inside.

Garo is participating in this meeting, too, as the Fen Wolf representative. Her daughters, Shiro and Kuro, who are always following her around, seem to be minding their home right now. It would be too disruptive to have an actual meeting with those two kids in attendance. And certain people—read Zenobia—might have lost it at how cute they are, rendering the meeting useless in another way.

"...Fine. I'll accept that for now," says Zenobia. "But who are you?"

"What? We've met before." Garo raises an eyebrow at the dubious inquiry about her identity. "...Ah, this is your first time seeing me in this form."

Garo slowly does a forward roll in midair, and a moment later, she's changed into a splendid black wolf.

"Grwl? (*And now? Do you recognize me?*)"

"Wha...?! You—You're that wolf from before...! You can change into a human?!"

Zenobia is stunned. I guess anyone would be shocked at a wolf pretending to be a person.

Incidentally, Garo learned the shape-shifting technique for the pretty dumb purpose of changing into a human to charm me—someone who is not a furry—so I'd appreciate you not listening to her.

"I had no idea you ranked so highly as a monster that you could transform into a person... Wait. If you can do it, then can Routa...?"

Pretty sharp for the dim-witted Zenobia.

"Of course. It would not trouble His Majesty the king in the slightest."

Uhh, actually, it would. What is going on with those strange expectations of hers?

Sure, I can *use* the shape-shifting technique. In fact, I'm using it at this very moment. All to maintain a size that I can just barely insist belongs to a dog.

"Meow. (*That's the dumbest use for it in the whole world.*)"

Nahura, who has joined up with us via teleportation, climbs onto my back.

"Arf. (*Don't call it dumb. That's rude.*)"

For me, this is the *best* use for it in the world.

Considering my rate of growth in the past, I'm too terrified to even think about how big I would become if I dispelled the transformation. I'm keeping it on for the rest of my life.

And so I can say for certain that I will never, ever transform into a human like Garo does.

"Arwf! (*Indeed... It's all for...!*)"

For my goal to lead a happy life as a pet!

That's the whole reason I quit being a human and reincarnated as a dog. Why would I be so sad I wanted to go back to being a human?

Yes to doggy slaves, and *no* to corporate slaves.

"...Well, fine. That's not what we're here for anyway," sighs Zenobia upon seeing me get all proud and haughty.

Huh? Why does it seem like you're fed up? I just said something real good. That's weird.

"Squeak... (*I personally don't think you uttered even a fraction of anything good...*)"

"Meow. (*I just don't understand how Routa's brain*

works. I do understand he's hopeless, though.)"

I am not hopeless.

As the usual exchange between us unfolds yet again, Mircalla loses her patience. "Why are we even *here* right now in the first place? Was there something to do besides introducing ourselves?"

She's a little cranky, probably because all she had for lunch was a salad.

Her words are right on the mark, though. Aside from Zenobia, everyone here is acquainted, and even Zenobia has gotten an explanation of most things from Hecate.

Like Mircalla says, it would seem that now that we all know each other, there's nothing else to do, but...

"What are you saying?" responds Zenobia. "Generals from the Demon Lord's army have appeared three times now. It's only natural to think it will happen a fourth and fifth time. Most importantly, since the Demon Lord himself could be close to reviving, this is an emergency."

Hmm. Zenobia is pretty gung ho today. She must really want to make some plans to defeat the Demon Lord's army.

Is my presence really required for that conversation? Why are they taking for granted that I'm part of their combat force? Did they all forget I'm a house pet?

"Squeak. *(Please. You are the strongest in this group, milord.)*"

Oh, you and your little jokes. I'm just a helpless pet—my only strength is my cuteness.

"Squeak, squeak? *(Would a helpless pet have been able to brute-force his way past three of the Demon Lord's generals?)*"

"Mew, mew. *(You took them all down pretty handily, Routa. Without you here, the world might have been in grave danger by now.)*"

Grrr. I just want to be a dog. This Fenrir body is getting in the way of my peaceful pet life.

"Fighting one personally has opened my eyes," continues

Zenobia. “If we let even one of the generals do as they please, it won’t matter if we stand at the head of entire armies—humanity wouldn’t be able to fight something like them.”

Zenobia’s lousy sense of direction, hasty conclusions, and general uselessness are the things that always stand out about her—but that’s right. She used to be an extremely skilled adventurer.

And if Zenobia says it, it must be true.

Humanity’s a little *too* weak, isn’t it? What happened a thousand years ago during its battle with the Demon Lord anyway?

“Squeak. (*It is true that humankind is weak, but we are the paragons of our own races.*)”

So it’s not that humanity is too weak, just that this group is a menagerie of absolute monsters. Well, you can count me out of that.

“Mew. (*No can do, mister.*)”

“Squeak. (*Accept it with grace.*)”

Damn it...

“Until now, we’ve been responding as the enemies revive. But we won’t make any progress if we keep doing nothing until their revivals and losing the initiative. We need to make the first strike this time, before the enemies have a chance to reawaken!”

Zenobia emphasizes her point with a tightly clenched fist.

Nice. I should have expected such a perfect plan from Zenobia. Well, aside from how nobody knows where the bad guys will be coming from.

“Umm, just so you know,” says Mircalla, “I don’t remember where the other generals were sealed. It’s been a thousand years. My memory’s hazy.”

“I fear I do not know, either,” adds Richmond. “The last of the five generals are Gigas, the chief of the giants, and Behemoth, the warrior leader of beasts. They were likely sealed somewhere nearby, as we were, but to be frank, it

will be nigh impossible to find their locations, since the geography has changed in the last millennium.”

“What...?”

Swiftly shot down by the two former generals, Zenobia is flabbergasted.

Did her plans rely fully on their memories?

“The Fen Wolves regularly patrol the forest, but we haven’t found any notable traces of them.”

“Elves excel in detecting mana, but we haven’t sensed anything that might be them...”

Garou, now human again, and Aruru, lying against me, deliver the finishing blows.

“G-great...” Zenobia takes a knee. “That’s it, then... We’re at the end of our rope...!”

That was fast. Shouldn’t have even bothered having a meeting. Well, I suppose that was a well-thought-out plan for the muscle-brained Gorillanobia. I’ll pet her on the head.

“Arf, arf? (*Aww, well, that’s too bad, isn’t it?*)”

“Hey, stop that! Don’t pet my head like you’re a friend or something! Your paws— The feeling of those paws is—!”

Zenobia is being very cute, trying to resist but loving how squishy my paws are. Her face reddens with embarrassment, and she rapidly grows more teary-eyed. I can feel her anger gauge filling.

That humiliated expression—I want to lick it.

“Ugh...!”

As I keep giving her head pats as she bites her lip in frustration, I think.

“Arwf... (*Well, that does put a damper on things...*)”

In reality, even if the Demon Lord’s army revives, we can’t do anything until it makes the first move. And it turns out the Hero we were relying on was a fake, brainwashed by a magic sword.

Come to think of it, I wonder if that fake Hero, Allie, is doing all right. She set off with a bright and cheerful look

after the magic sword's mental control was dispelled, which is all well and good, but unfortunately, the *real* Hero has yet to appear.

Where are you, true Hero? Please hurry and switch with me and wipe out the Demon Lord's army. Why does a pet dog like me have to do the fighting?

Is there even a Hero in this age to begin with? I just assumed, since people told me the army's generals are reviving and there's a Demon Lord around, that there must be a Hero as well. Except they've shown no signs of appearing.

"What? What on *earth* are you talking about? The true Hero is your—"

"M-Mircalla! The Lady Witch made us promise not to talk about that...!"

"Ack!"

Huh? What? Wait, do Mircalla and Richmond know something about the real Hero?

"I... I, err, I don't know! I didn't say anything!"

"Arrrf? (*Hmmm? You serious?*)"

The ears of Fenrir hear all. I will not miss even those hushed words.

"I'm... I'm telling the truth!"

Your eyes are wandering something awful, Mircalla.

"Arf, arf. (*If you're not honest with me, you'll face a punishment of licking.*)"

"What? That's not even scary. You can do that all you want."

Huh? Wait, did I just get permission to lick her?!

Seriously? I get to lick a beautiful blond girl all I want? This is exciting...

"Compared to that witch's punishment, being licked all over my body is... It's... Urp, I don't feel so good..."

"Eep...! Mircalla, please don't make me remember that...!" Richmond yelps.

It looks like the two of them have been through some

pretty awful stuff. They start trembling all over as their minds flash back to it.

How nasty. What on earth did Hecate even make them do?

Also, I'm not going to do anything perverted like lick her *all* over. You got that? Just a little licking on the cheek. You got that?

"Meow. (*Routa, you've never licked someone on the face to begin with.*)"

Who are you calling a licking virgin?!

Look, I'm just— I'm just a *gentleman dog*, okay? It would be rude to drool all over someone's face without any restraint! It is *not* because I'm a chicken.

"Mew? (*Really? Is that really true?*)"

I look away from Nahura as she sends a narrow-eyed smirk my way.

Len, who is on my head, turns upside down to look at me. "Squeak. (*Milord, not that I am on their side, but I believe it would be wise not to trust the Lady Witch too much.*)"

Wait, what are you getting all serious for?

"Squeak, squeak. (*Listen to me. I know you've noticed that she has been doing much in secret.*)"

"Arf. (*I guess.*)"

Hecate appears in unexpected places at unexpected times. She shows up at the mansion every now and again to check on Lady Mary, but she's almost never around when things happen.

She appears right as the incidents are wrapping up. Capturing the Demon Lord's generals and making them into her familiars, drawing that giant magic circle at the waterfall where Len lived... She's probably hiding a lot more from us, too.

"Arf, arf. (*It's true that I don't know very much about Hecate.*)"

She's Lady Mary's primary doctor, an acquaintance of Papa's from when he was young, and a legendary witch

with amazing abilities that every elf knows about. That's about all I know.

"Squeak. (You see? Even I cannot predict how that one will act. She is clearly hiding information from us. Her objectives are an enigma.)"

Len's right—maybe there's good reason to be suspicious of Hecate.

"Arf, arf. (But Hecate doesn't seem like a bad person to me.)"

Even without knowing her goals, we can acknowledge the outcome: We let the generals slip away, and she captured them and made it so they can't be evil anymore. Even at the waterfall, if she hadn't exhausted the mana with a magic circle, a large-scale magical disaster could have occurred. She's helped us out several times in the past, and she's never done anything to hurt us.

"Woof, woof. (Also, when Hecate talks to the people at the mansion, she always has a really kind look on her face.)"

Hecate has the outfit of a seductress, but she's so mild when talking to Papa and Lady Mary, and it seems like she enjoys it. I can sense that, like me, she considers all the people at the mansion important. Even if Hecate does have an ulterior motive, it's probably something crucial. And her silence regarding the Hero must be something she deems necessary.

"Arf, arf. (So no matter what happens, I'll trust her. She's taken good care of me, too.)"

"Meow... (Routa... Thank you. I'm sure the mistress would be overjoyed to hear that.)"

Nahura, who has tears coming to her eyes, sniffs.

"Mew, mewl. (Oh, I said 'would'—but she actually is, right now. I'm connected to her, so it's like she's eavesdropping on the whole conversation. She's sensitive despite how she looks, and I think she was worried that you might be suspicious of her, Routa. Getting anxious and

keeping an ear out like this—it's embarrassing, at her age. Oh. Oops. Wait, that means she knows that I just revealed all that—)"

Remotely punished by something, Nahura gives a yelp and falls over.

"Arf... (You just never learn...)"

"Mew, mew... (Always saying one word too many is my biggest asset...)"

What kind of asset is that?

"Squeak. (I suppose a witch who employs such a foolish cat as a familiar cannot possibly be a villain. Very well, then. If you will trust her, milord, so too shall I.)"

It looks like Nahura's selling point immediately helped out. That's good. You've won Len's trust by being so dumb.

"Mew, mew... (I'm honored to have been of service...)"

Oh—she just passed out.

As she collapses, I pick her neck up in my mouth and toss her onto my back.

"Arf, arf. (Anyway, there's not much else to talk about, so let's call it for today.)"

When I say that, everyone nods.

"Ahh, come *on*," complains Mircalla. "It's already past lunch. I ended up missing out on my meal."

"There, there," says Richmond. "Let's wait for dinner. Until then, it's back to work for us. We will be taking our leave now."

The two, accustomed to their roles as servants, give perfect bows and depart.

"Lord Routa, if you have the time," says Aruru, "would you not allow us to wait on you?"

Wait on me... What a wonderful phrase. As a pet, the one thing I have in spades is time. Lady Mary is busy with her afternoon studies with Drills, so that's no problem at all. Entertain me to your heart's content.

"Ahh, thank goodness. Let's hurry and prepare!"

""""Okaaay!""""

The elf girls give a hearty response and start preparing to entertain me.

"Arw-rw... (Huh-heh-heh... I wonder what today's snack will be?)"

Elf food is simple, with mild flavors. Its tastes are altogether different from the old man's heavily spiced, more Western style, but they're delicious in their own right.

"Please rest here until we are finished preparing, Lord Routa."

They lead me to a bed of many leaves sitting in a pile on the ground.

But don't make light of simple leaves. These are from the Worldtree, where the elves live. They're both soft and sturdy. Apparently, if you pound them and take out the fiber, they make good string. The leafy bed feels like a fluffy carpet when I lie down on it. Perfect for naps.

"Arf, arf... (The Worldtree sure is something else...)"

Its wide trunk serves as the elves' home, its thick cover of leaves as their clothing materials, and its plentiful nuts as their bread ingredients.

The Worldtree is indispensable to the elves. I look up at it; it rises high over the other tall trees in the forest like a tower. It's a sight to behold. A tree this enormous will surely be able to maintain the elves' lifestyle from now on.

"We have you to thank for the Worldtree growing so tall, Lord Routa. No Worldtree of this magnitude has ever been planted, even in our homeland."

"Arwf? (Wait, what did I do again?)"

Things I've done at the elves' village: eat, sleep, and that's it.

"Umm, well, that is... Your urine, that is..."

I get it. Don't say it.

I put a stop to Aruru as her face reddens.

It seems the same gigantification that happened to the old man's fields happened with the Worldtree, too. And now that I think about it, I do remember relieving myself around

there once when I was too lazy to go off somewhere else to do my business.

The Worldtree, needing a large amount of nutrients to grow, hoarded so much that it caused all the plant life nearby to decay. So the stuff that came out of me must have been *really* good fertilizer.

I'll use the bathroom in the mansion from now on. I *must* buck up and actually do it, without being lazy—at least when I'm nearby. I'm too scared of the trees or grass in the gardens expanding like that. The old gardener might faint.

"Now then, please rest, Lord Routa. If I may humbly offer, I could sing you a lullaby at your side to let you sleep well..."

"Hey, no fair!"

"That right is reserved for the eldest daughter and village chief."

"Where was I when you decided that?!"

The elf girls start loudly badgering each other.

Excuse me, but would you mind letting me sleep in peace?

"What was that?!"

"Arwf?! (*Huh? What?!?*)"

Hearing the sudden, angry shout, I jump up. Wait, were we being noisy?! Sorry! It wasn't me, though!

"Shiro and Kuro are missing? Are you sure?!"

That shout came from Garo. She's speaking with someone on the outskirts of the village.

"Bow...! (*I'm terribly sorry, Lady Garo...! They were with me, and then they were gone...!*)"

"Gohh... (*Wait—it's not Bal's fault. I was the one watching them when they disappeared. I only took my eyes off them for a moment, and now...*)"

In front of Garo, two creatures are hanging their heads—one is Bal, a Fen Wolf with brown coloring, and the other is Redarmor, a black bear with red chest fur.

"Goh, gohh. (*I think they heard about the meeting from*

someone. They've been wanting to see the king ever since morning. They snuck away from me without me realizing, and I figured they'd come here, so we followed them, but...)"

"No, they haven't come here..."

"Bow...! (I'm terribly sorry, Lady Garo...! I shall atone for this carelessness with my life...!)"

"Don't be a fool...!"

Seriously. Don't say stuff like that.

"Arf, arf? (Wait, what's all this about Shiro and Kuro being missing?)"

"Sir! I'm ashamed you had to witness that. We will be taking our leave now to deal with a pressing matter."

"Arf. (Wait, what are you saying? I'm obviously going to help search.)"

The more searchers we have, the faster we'll find them. I'm not overly familiar with this forest, but I'm better than nothing.

"Y-you would deign to lend us your strength...?! But we cannot allow the king himself to be bothered with such trifles!"

"Arf, arwf. (Quit being so formal. I'm one of the Fen Wolves, too, aren't I?)"

Well, actually, I'm just a dog, not a Fen Wolf. It's more like I'm an *honorary* Fen Wolf.

"My king...!"

Garo is moved to tears by this.

"Squeak. (You seem lazy about everything, but you're manly when it counts.)"

"Mew? (A natural womanizer, huh?)"

Quit being stupid. We have to get going.

"Your Majesty...! Thank you...! I will never forget this favor...!"

Whoa, hey—don't embrace me! It poses all kinds of problems!

No! No licking! Don't lick me in thanks when you look

like that! Noooooooooooooo!!





"I am ashamed of my behavior."

Seriously. That certainly wasn't the kind of dreadful state any good boy or girl would want to be seen in.

"It hasn't been much time since Shiro and Kuro went missing. For now, let's split up and call out their names. In the meantime, I will send Bal and Redarmor to send a message to the other clans."

"Arf! (*Gotcha! We should just call their names while searching for them?*)"

"Thank you. I assume their goal was to meet the king. If they hear your voice, they will surely appear."

Great. Time to start the mission.

"Wait just a minute."

Eep?! I jump in fright at the sudden address from behind me.

"Mgh— You...the human woman...! Since when have you been there?!"

Garro, who leaped backward, stares at Zenobia with caution.

"Um, I've been walking behind you the whole time."

"What...?! You were at our backs without the Fen Wolves detecting your presence...?!"

I always knew Zenobia had it in her. The woman is wilder

than the Fen Wolves. Pretty crazy that she could creep behind natural-born hunters. Did she get born as the wrong species or something?

"I didn't understand what Routa was saying," says Zenobia, "but I figured most of it out from his conversation with you. You have companions named Shiro and Kuro, and they've gone missing, right?"

"Yes, but...what does that have to do with you?" Garo frowns in suspicion.

Zenobia puts a hand to her chest and answers, "I'll help you look. I'm a former adventurer, after all. I'm great at exploring forests."

"But why? This has nothing to do with your kind. I had thought greedy humans could only act according to their own good..."

The Fen Wolves seem to harbor a grudge against humans, and there's a danger in her attitude even toward Zenobia. Zenobia can probably sense that, but she steps forward instead of shrinking away.

"We're already collaborating with one another. And I cannot feign ignorance when I see someone in need."

"Hmm. It's true that the more we have searching the better... But let me ask you this, human female. Can your two legs keep pace with the Fen Wolves?"

"Arf. *(Oh, that won't be a problem.)*"

After all, she once ran all the way from here to the sacred mountain in the far north in a single night. Her leg strength is on par with the Fen Wolves'. She's sure to put in the kind of work worthy of her Gorillanobia name.

"If you so decree, my king..."

"Hey, I don't know what he just said, but I bet it was something rude."

I didn't say anything! I only thought it in my head.

"Arf, arf. *(Let's get searching, then. Zenobia, let's go together.)*"

If we left Zenobia alone, with her almighty bad sense of

direction, we're sure to have a third missing person case on our hands.



"Awooooooooo! (Meeeeeeeeiiiiiii— Er, wait, Shirooo! Kurooo! Where are you?!)"

"Meooooooooooooooooooooow! (Please come oooooooooout! Everyone's worried about you!)"

"Squeeeaaaak! (If you come out now, I don't think your mother will scold you that much!)"

We search for Shiro and Kuro as we weave through the forest.

Garou and the others returned to recruit volunteers from the clans and put together a search team, and I think they've already started searching outward in every direction. I thought the Fen Wolves, with their good senses of smell, would find them in no time if they really tried, but it doesn't seem like anyone's located them yet.

We, on the other hand, wouldn't be able to work alongside trained Fen Wolves—in fact, we decided we'd be a hindrance. Now we're scouring the forest haphazardly in a separate group.

"What's wrong, Routa? Use your nose already. Sniff them out."

Umm, Zenobia, please don't ask the impossible. This Fenrir body might be high-spec, but the soul inside is just the low-spec me. There are so many different varieties of smell coming into my nose. Do you really think I can pull off something as advanced as isolating Shiro's and Kuro's scents?

"Stupid mutt..."

"Arf! (Thank you so much for the compliment!)"

That's right. I am not the Fen Wolf King, Fenrir, but a single stupid dog. Zenobia really gets me!

“Ugh. Why are you wagging your tail around like you’re happy...?!”

“Arwf... *(I get the feeling that maybe I do smell something in this direction, I think...)*”

It’s pretty much just a gut instinct, but I think I can sense Shiro’s and Kuro’s smells in the direction we’re headed now. Maybe, I think, possibly.

“Squeak. *(That is quite vague.)*”

“Woof! *(Then you search! You get down on the ground and sniff! Sometimes dirt gets up my nostrils and it really stings!)*”

“Squeak. *(Dragons don’t have such excellent noses.)*”

“Woof?! *(What about Nahura?!)*”

“Meow. *(Unfortunately, I am no more than a homunculus in cat form, so my sense of smell is not particularly extraordinary.)*”

Y-you’re all useless...!

“Hm! Is that what you were following? Found them!”

And why does Zenobia’s nose work even better than mine?! She’s never even met Shiro and Kuro, so how could she possibly sniff them out? You *definitely* got born as the wrong species.

“Let’s go! Follow me!”

“Woof, woof! *(Right, right!)*”

Talk about a reversal of leadership. Go, Zenobi-One! Guide us to where Shiro and Kuro are!

When we follow Zenobia, who has started to run, we hear the whispering of a river.

“This is...” Zenobia stops at the riverbed. “The scent ends here...”

“Squeak...? *(Could the children have gone into the water...?)*”

You can’t be serious. The water level may be low, but it’s more than enough to wash them away, given how small they are.

“Grwl! *(My king, there you are!)*”

"Woof? (Oh, Garo, you're here, too?)"

Garo, who has returned to wolf form, runs along the river to us.

"Grwl, grwl... (Sir! We arrived here after tracking their scent, but river water washes scents away...)"

"Woof, woof. (Not good. Maybe we'd better search downstream.)"

"Grwl. (Sir, I've already sent several wolves that way, but I believe the possibility of that is low.)"

"Arwf? (Is it?)"

"Grwl. (My daughters are Fen Wolves themselves. They wouldn't have been drowned and washed away by such a calm river. I did not raise them to be so fragile.)"

"Woof. (I see. That's a relief, at least.)"

"Grwl, grwl. (Yes, sir. The river is usually higher at this time, but we were fortunate. We'll expand our search from this location. My king, if you would, please continue searching independently. There are sure to be many things we Fen Wolves would not notice.)"

"Woof. (Got it. We'll go to the other side of the river, then.)"

"Grwl! (Yes! Thank you, my king!)"

Garo lowers her head, then calls her Fen Wolves together. As far as I can tell from the way she quickly and clearly explains the change in plans, she seems calm. Even with her daughters missing, she's still been calmly analyzing the situation, delivering precise instructions to her subordinates.

"Arf... (No...)"

It's only on the surface. Garo's tail is drooping, limp, flitting from side to side restlessly. There's no way she wouldn't be worried about her daughters' disappearance.

"Arf, arf. (We've gotta find them fast.)"

I dip my toes in the river water. It's not too deep. Only up to Zenobia's shins, about. Garo's right: They wouldn't have ever drowned in this. Still, with early autumn approaching,

the river water is cold. A child's small body would probably catch a chill quickly. And if they stayed wet, they ran the risk of getting sick.

"Woof, woof! (*Okay, let's hurry!*)" I pump myself up again and slosh into the river.

"Yip! (*Eek! It's so cold!*)"

What? We have to cross this river? But it's freezing! It's impossible! We should take a detour!

"What are you doing?! Get a move on!"

I look and see Zenobia has long since crossed the river. She's totally into this.

"Mew. (*Stare.*)"

"Squeak. (*Stare.*)"

What are you looking at me like that for? You two have it so nice! All you do is ride on top of me! Dogs being strong against cold? That's a myth! I know this is gonna be icy.

"Arrrrwww... (*Urr... It's cold, it's so cold...*)"

I trot across to the other side of the river, and by the time I reach Zenobia, I'm freezing all over.

"Arwrwrwr... (*S-s-s-so cold...*)"

"What am I going to do with you...?"

Unable to watch me shiver anymore, Zenobia takes a small leather pouch from the bag on her waist.

"Drink it a little at a time. It'll warm you up."

I lick up the droplets dripping from the proffered pouch.

"Arwf... (*Wow, that's so sweet...*)"

Is this brandy? The heat in my throat hits the spot, and then it spreads from my stomach to the rest of my body. Zenobia's bag is almost like magic, huh?

"I mixed it with maple syrup to make it easier to drink. It's higher proof than you might think. Don't have so much. You'll get drunk."

"Meow! (*I got pretty cold, too!*)"

"Squeak! (*And I—and I!*)"

Hey! You two aren't even wet! No fair!

Snatching it back and forth, we polish off the rest of the

sweet brandy.

"Well, well. You drank the whole thing. Not drunk, are you?"

"Woof! (*I'm totally fine!*)"

A Fenrir body's liver is still Fenrir-class. With my body all nice and warm, I feel like I could start running right away.

"Let's get back to the search!"

"Woof! (*Got it!*)"



"A-arwf... (*We... We've looked everywhere...*)"

After that, we run around the forest searching for Shiro and Kuro, but they're nowhere to be found.

"Hrm. If we go any farther south than this, we'll end up at the mansion."

If we go even farther, we'll find a small village and some homes, too.

"We'd definitely have to get the wolves' help if we were going to include the human village in our search..."

But if we had the Fen Wolves look around the human village, everyone would be panicking, shouting that there were monsters. Not everyone in the world is going to be blind. It's just that the people at the mansion are special. In that case, we would have to search with only Zenobia and the people from the elves' village. If Shiro and Kuro headed for the human village, we're done for. We clearly lack the manpower.

"Let's search the mansion as well, just in case," says Zenobia. "And we should eat something. We won't get much done if we're exhausted."

I look up to see that the sky is already reddish orange. The delightful scents of dinner are drifting from the mansion. We've been out since this afternoon, so I haven't played with the young ladies at all. I hope they're not

worried.

"Arwf. (We walked a lot... That tired me out.)"

We leave the forest and come out into the old man's fields. As always, the vegetables are way bigger than they have any right to be. With squash that big, you could make a carriage. They don't even lose flavor because of it, which is what's amazing. Apparently, the Fenrir urine is still fortifying the soil. We probably won't want for vegetables in the near future. Maybe we could give some to the elves' village.

Once we pass through the fields, we decide to stop by the stable where Mare and the others are.

"Woof, woof. (Heya, Mr., Mrs., and Mare. Doing well?)"

"Neigh. (Hello, Mr. Wolf. Yes, yes—it is still far too soon for us to be ferried away.)"

"Whicker. (Ever since Mare came, I feel young again. I'm not about to give up my wagon pulling to anyone!)"

"Neeigh. (Eh-heh-heh. I sure hope you both live long lives.)"

The horses poke their heads out of the stable and greet us in turn.

"Woof, woof? (By the way, have you seen any small wolves around here? A white one and a black one?)"

I know they're not here, but we may as well ask, right?

"Neigh. (Yes, we did.)"

"Woof... (Oh well, thanks anyway... I didn't expect you to, but—What?! You did?!)"

"Neeigh. (Why yes! They were quite bouncy. Although it seems they didn't like our carrots very much.)"

Mare and the others shared their snacks with them, huh? Still, that's tough—giving wolves raw carrots. That's a cultural barrier, so forgive them.

Wait, that's not important right now.

"Woof, woof? (Do you know where they went?)"

"Whicker. (After they played here for a time, they headed for the mansion. It wasn't too long ago.)"

For real? Then if we hurry, we can catch them.

"Arwf! (Thanks! That really helps!)"

"Neeeeigh. (Not at all. Please tell them we said hello.)"

I thank Mare and the others and point my nose toward the mansion.

"What were you talking about?" Zenobia is tilting her head to the side, having not understood what we were saying.

"Arwf! (Just that we know where Shiro and Kuro are now. Let's go, Zenobia!)"

"H-hey! What are you running away for?!"

We hurry and dash for the mansion.

Once it comes into view, we can hear delighted voices coming from the courtyard. The cute, high-pitched voices belong to Lady Mary and Drills.

"Arwf! (Hup!)" I give a mighty leap over the high mansion wall and land in the yard.

And there...

"They're very fluffy. They look just like Routa when he was little."

...are Lady Mary, who is holding Shiro...

"This black one is adorable as well."

...and Drills, petting Kuro.

Neither Shiro nor Kuro seems to be hurt or tired, and they're innocently letting the two girls play with them.

"Hee-hee. That tickles!" Lady Mary laughs as Shiro licks her cheek.

"Lick, lick! (This one smells a lot like Daddy!)"

"Lick, lick! (So does this female! They must sleep together every night to smell this much like him!)"

"Lick, lick! (Well, how dare they! I'll lick him away from them!)"

"Lick, lick! (We'll make them smell like us instead!)"

I thought they were busy being pampered, but I was completely wrong. It is true, though, that ever since Drills came to stay here, I've been sleeping sandwiched between

the two of them. That's enough to make any scent sink in.

"Arwf! (*Wait, that's not important!*)"

"Squeak. (*Indeed. First, we must give them a good scolding.*)"

Yeah, let's really let them have it.

"Woof, woof!! (*Hey, you two!!*)"

I raise my voice at the baby wolves, who don't even understand they've done something wrong.

"Woof, woof!! (*It's not fair for you two to hog all the licking!! Not even I've ever licked them like that before!!*)"

"Squeak! (*That's not what you should be angry about!*)"

"Meow? (*Routa never changes, huh?*)"

Huh? Wait, could this be my chance? Couldn't I join the group and lick Lady Mary with them? Is this my first ever licky-licky opportunity?!

"Woo! (*Oh, it's Daddy!*)"

"Woo, woo! (*Daddy! Daddy!*)"

I'm not your father. I'm your king. Actually, I'm not that, either, but still.

""Woo, woo! (*Daddyyy!!*)""

Shiro and Kuro jump down from the two girls and bolt straight for me.

"Arwf...! (*Wait, just stay like that for another minute, so I can...!*)"

That was the perfect chance to give the girls some licks!

"Woo, woo! (*Daddy! We came to see you, Daddy!*)"

"Woo, woo! (*We did our best to come here! Are you proud?*)"

Wagging their tails so hard they might come off, Shiro and Kuro look at me with sparkles in their eyes.

I look down at them and answer haughtily:

"Woof! (*I am not!*)"

""Woo...? (*Huh...?*)"" Shiro's and Kuro's ears droop.

"Woof, woof! (*Fwa-ha-ha! I've had much greater adventures than you two have! I even crossed a really cold river!*)"

“Squeak...? (*Why compete with children...?*)” Len retorts, but Shiro’s and Kuro’s ears stick up again, and they wag their tails.

“Woo, woo! (*Daddy, you’re so great!*)”

“Woo, woo! (*Shiro and Kuro had to turn around! We couldn’t get through the cold! But you crossed it! That’s amazing!*)”

Right? Right?! You can say that again!

Wait, you two turned back? Well, you missed out!

“I don’t know what it is you’re talking about, but I can tell it’s something dumb...”

H-how could you get all that from just “Woof, woof”?! I get the feeling Zenobia’s instincts have gotten sharper. Please go back to being a useless lump.

“But there’s little doubt these two are Shiro and Kuro. Why, their fur matches their names. What a cheap way of naming them.”

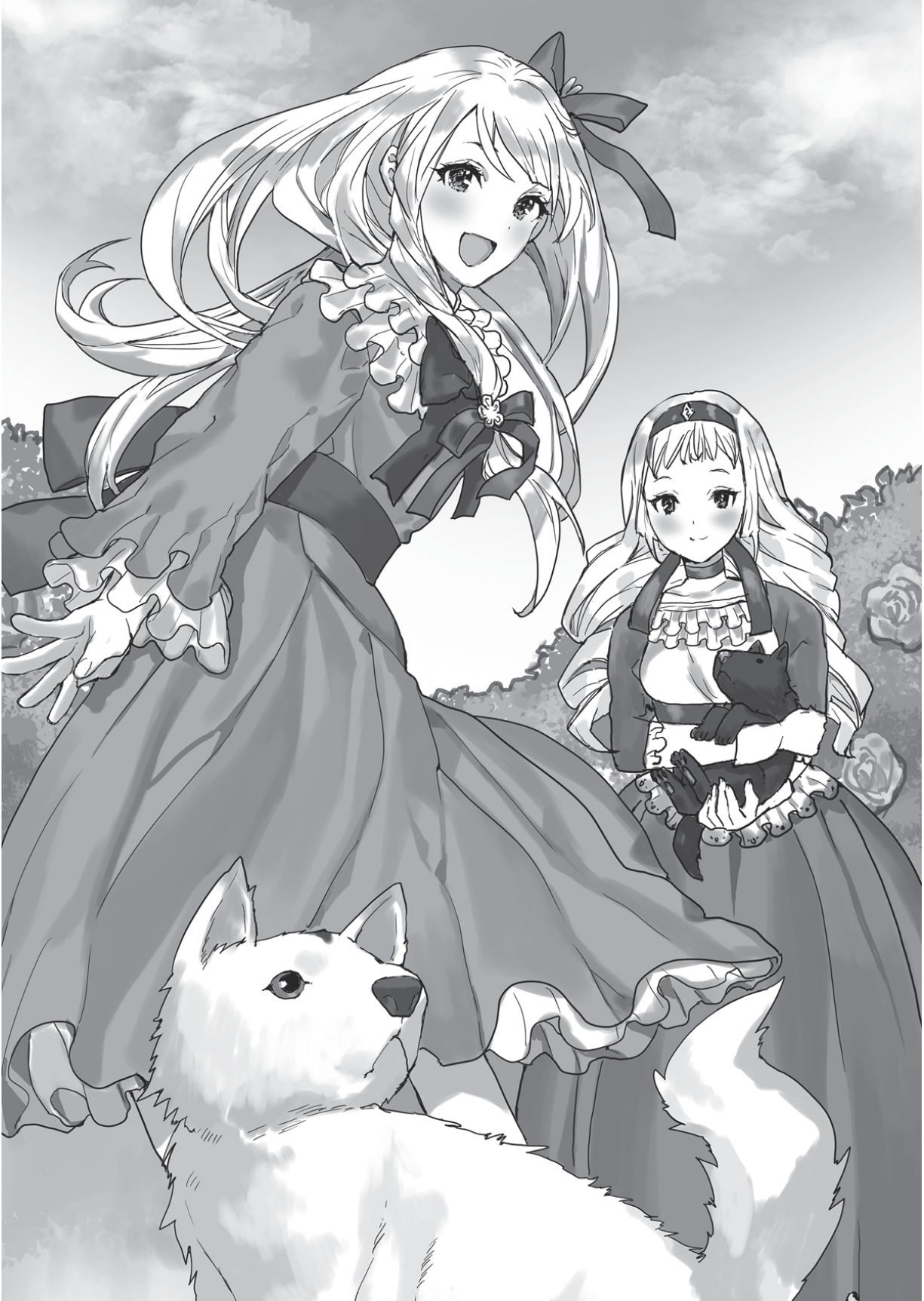
My bad. I’m the namer.

“Woo! (*Hey, don’t make fun of the names Daddy gave us! You’re really rude, lady!*)”

“Woo! (*I’ll bite you! Om nom nom!*)”

“Wh-what’s this? You want me to hold you? Heh-heh. You’re very friendly.”

No, they’re showing you nothing but hostility right now. Zenobia, who can’t understand them, peels their teeth off her boots and lifts them both into her arms.





"Woo! (Stop it! I don't like you!)"

"Woo! (Huh?! This female has the same scent as Daddy, too!)"

"Woo! (Really? It's even thicker than on the females from before!)"

Oh, that's probably because of the stuffed animal Zenobia has.

The thing is stuffed full of my fur. And she keeps it in her cleavage 24-7, so she must *really* smell like me now.

"Woo, woo! (I'll lick it off you! I'll lick it off you!)"

"Hey— What— Where do you think you're licking?! That tickles— Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Damn you both! I have nothing but envy. Let me in.

"Squeak? (More importantly, shouldn't we inform the mother that her daughters are safe?)"

"Arwf. (Whoops! You're right.)"

I give a howl high into the sky.

As if in response, several howls come back in sequence from afar, with my information getting to the distant Garo. The Fen Wolves are the forest's hunters, and they have the speed of information transmission to match. I only howled the way I'd been taught to, but it looks like it went well.

After a few moments, Garo arrives at a ferocious speed.

"Grwl! (Shiro! Kuro! Are you all right?!)"

"Wow! Now a big black puppy dog is here, too!"

Oh crap, it surprised my lady. But she's as blind as ever. Her eyes seem to be perfectly perceiving Garo as a dog.

"Yes, that certainly is a grand-looking dog. How beautiful..."

And Lady Mary's friend deserves mention, too. She's got the same level of blindness.

"Woo! (Oh! It's Mommy!)"

"Woo! (Mommy!)"

Shiro and Kuro jump from Zenobia's arms—she's collapsed to the ground already—and run over to Garo.

"Grwl... (You look fine...)"

Garō sighs in relief.

It's a little late to mention it, but Garō takes a formal, polite tone with her children. Maybe it's so they don't learn any strange word choices.

Still, as far as I've seen, it hasn't been working much.

"Grrr... (You understand what happens now, right? Mommy told you to be obedient and stay at home. I know you know the punishment for going against that...)"

""W-woo! (W-we're sorry! Mommy!)"

"Grwl! (No, I will not forgive this. Do you have any idea how much trouble you've caused? Well, you will have plenty of time to think it over!)"

""Wooo! (Nooo! Help us! Daddy!)"

The baby wolves run away from the barking Garō and cling to my feet.

"Arwf. (Well, they're safe and sound, so go easy on them, all right? You don't need to be extra angry at them for my sake.)"

Children are invincible beings equipped with perpetual motion devices and acceleration features, so there's no point trying to get them to sit still. She should have taken them along with her instead of having them stay at home.

"Woo! (Daddy! You're so nice! I love you!)"

Shirō and Kuro rub up against me.

"Grwl... (Now you're making me out to be the villain... Shirō, Kuro, I'm so glad you're safe...)"

Garō, anger quelled, walks over and brings her face to Shirō's and Kuro's.

"They're so close with one another...! I bet these children are her family...!"

Drills, watching over us, is moved.

"Would that mean this black dog is Routa's wife? And not only does he have a wife, he's had children as well...?"

Huh?

Upon hearing Drills's words, Lady Mary is flabbergasted.

"W-wait, really? Routa, is that true...?"

Huh? What?

I feel a misunderstanding barreling toward us like an avalanche.

"W-woof, woof! (No, that's not it, Lady Mary! I don't have any dependents! My beloved family is Papa and you and everyone at the mansion, and that's it! These are my friends, just friends!)"

Please don't remove me from your list of family members, please! I still want you all to raise meeeeeeeeeeeee!

"Woo? (Daddy, you're not our Daddy?)"

"Woo? (Really?)"

"A-arw... (Errr...)"

No, not even if you look at me with those cute round eyes! I'm still a puppy, only a few months old! Stop trying to make me take responsibility!

"Grwl, grwl. (Shiro, Kuro, you mustn't do that. His Majesty is our liege, not your father.)"

Oh! Garo is backing me up! Thanks a million. Go ahead, tell them what our actual relationship is. Tell them we're not related by blood, so they should stop calling me their father.

"Grwl, grwl. (Stop addressing the king as if he is your father.)"

Yes, that's right. Stop that.

"Grwl, grwl... (The reason being...)"

Yes, the reason being!

"...grwl, grwl. (...that it is essential that all Fen Wolves become His Majesty's wives.)"

Yes, that all Fen Wolves should be my— Urk!!

That's totally wrong! I thought you were backing me up, but you weren't! That wasn't support fire—you just tossed a grenade at me!

"Grwl, grwl. (And when you two grow up, you will one day be wives to the king as well. However, you cannot be his wives if he is your father and you his children. Are you okay with that?)"

ha...ha?"

When Papa comes out behind Lady Mary, he's struck speechless at the sight of Garo and the others.

"Is...? Could this be...?"

Ahh, now Papa is looking our way all surprised. Does even Papa think I'm a stupid, irresponsible dog now? There is no hope left. They're going to get rid of me. I'll be abandoned, and then I'll *have* to be the Fen Wolf King.

"Has Routa made a new family?!"

"That's right, Father! And they're our family, too!"

Huh? That's...not exactly how I expected them to react. They both seem to be overjoyed.

"Well, we can't just stand here. The bed in Mary's room might be a little small. Let's order a new special-made one posthaste."

"They might be hungry, too! We'll have to ask Mr. James for food!"

"Oh, yes! How wonderful! There is no greater joy than gaining new family members!"

Wait...what? It doesn't look like they'll get rid of me, but I didn't think they'd be so forward and accepting about it.

"Routa! Looks like you're quite the playboy, eh?"

Playboy? But I'm still pure—and that includes my past life. I try to argue the point as Papa pats me on the back, but my words don't get across, of course.

"I want to take a bath with everyone, too! I'll have the maids prepare the large bathtub!"

"That is a good idea!"

The young ladies are over the moon as they prepare to take in Garo and the others.

"Arwf? (*Uhh, so that's a thing. Did you three want to be part of the mansion?*)"

I have no intention of raising them, but it's fine if we're all raised together.

"Grwl. (*No, Lord Routa. I must humbly decline.*)"

Garo, however, takes Shiro and Kuro and backs away.

Her eyes are quiet but filled with an unmovable denial. Perhaps having sensed that rejection, the two young ladies quiet down as well and watch.

"Grwl, grwl. *(I have nothing but respect for you, Your Majesty. However, I cannot forgive humankind.)*"

"Woof, woof. *(I see. Well, that's fine. You can live in the forest, and I'll live at the mansion. I'll come to visit. With Len and Nahura.)*"

Garo nods and turns around.

""Woo! *(Daddy! See you soon!)*""

"Grwl. *(And you two are getting a talking-to when we get back.)*"

"Woo! *(Mommy, noooo!)*"

Mother and children leave toward the setting sun.

"They'll be together, even if they live apart...! How splendid...! How beautiful...!"

Drills has taken it upon herself to be touched.

They really just kind of left normally. They'll probably show up again at some point. I doubt those rambunctious little kids will want to stay put in the forest.

"Routa has children already, huh... I wonder when I'll have to start thinking about that sort of thing..."

"They sure were adorable. They reminded me of Routa when he was little."

I was little only a short time ago. I don't think it's something you can get *that* nostalgic about.

"Err, actually, Lady Mary, Lady Elizabeth, they do not seem to be Routa's wife and children."

Zenobia tries to clear up the misunderstanding for me.

"Arwf... *(Thanks, Zenobia. But maybe if you'd explained at an earlier stage, I wouldn't be this wiped out now...)*"

Exhausted, I can only go back for fifths during dinner.

I'll eat more tomorrow!

"Ah, Routa! Got one! Don't let it get away!"

"Arwf! (*You got it!*)"

I give a forceful swing of my tail, and a river crab about the size of a child's palm catapults up onto the shore.

"Great, that's the stuff!" The old man immediately grabs the crab and throws it into one of the buckets he brought. "Just like I thought—you really do have a knack for fishing."

Thank you muchly.

Anyway, are you sure you can call this *fishing*? I'm hanging my bushy tail on the surface of the water, right in the middle of the river, and wagging it around. Eventually small crabs hiding below the rocks grab on to it with their claws. And then I just pull them out really quick. That's all—but we've gotten quite a haul. The old man's bucket is already almost full.

"They're easy to reach now the water level's gone down."

The old man is giving this crab fishing his all, too; he's up to his knees in water. His method is to shove his hands directly into the rocks, but we're nearly neck and neck.

Not bad, old man. But I'm not playing second fiddle. If I catch a lot now, there will be more for me in the end! I can't wait to see what kind of dish he serves up with these crabs.

This place happens to be the small river we crossed when

Shiro and Kuro went missing. It's a bit far from the mansion, but I remembered a lot of fish swimming in the untouched water, as well as crab eyes poking out. The old man seemed to be going out to catch river crabs, so I led him here.

"You really found a nice little spot here, eh?"

"Arf, arf. *(Right? I did, didn't I? You can praise me more.)*"

Oh, but don't pet me with those sopping hands of yours, please.

"Wow, look at all the crabs!"

"It's so cute how they move their claws!"

The pair of young ladies are practically bouncing around as they peer into the bucket. When they saw us leaving, they tagged along.

"They're making bubbles in the water, see?"

"How fascinating. And adorable."

Well, those crabs the girls are so lovingly admiring are going to end up our dinner. Even so, I, a pure-hearted and innocent pet, would never actually say anything that crass.

Lady Mary seems like she's having fun, as always, but even Drills appears to be enjoying the nature here, which you can't get in the capital city. It's been almost a month since she came to stay at the mansion, but she seems to be having fun every day. Unlike when she was a highbrow, snot-nosed noble girl back in the city, she's been smiling in a cheerful way well suited to her age.

"Great, this should be enough. Let's wind this up!"

"Arwf. *(Roger that.)*"

I climb out of the river and shake the water off me.

"Squeak?! *(Huh?! What's going on?!)*"

Oops. I always forget Len is sleeping. I use my mane to catch her as she falls back out of the air. I just hope the old man didn't see that. Mice are the archenemies of cooks. If he finds her, he'll drown her and ship her away as burnable garbage.

"You don't need to hide it. I'm not gonna make it into a snack or anything."

Eep! Busted!

The old man, a bucket hanging from either hand, is looking this way with an idly amazed expression.

"A-arf, arf! *(Y-you've got it all wrong! She's a mouse, but she's not a mouse? Despite how she looks, she actually likes to keep herself clean, and she takes baths all the time!)*"

"It's your buddy, right? I see it occasionally eating meals with you and that cat from Miss Hecate's place. No need to slink around—be proud about it."

The old man is so open-minded.

"And besides, there is a certain habitual criminal snatching food from the kitchen who is more ill-mannered than mice."

Wait, who could that be? Sneaking into the old man's kitchen, every single night, and having an all-you-can eat buffet? What a fatty.

"Squeak. *(I'm not responding to that.)*"

Well, why *not*? Without your witty comebacks, what would you be left with? You really *would* be a NEET who does nothing but eat and sleep.

"Squeak! *(As if you're any different!)*"

I'm a pet, though, so it's okay. It's my job to eat, sleep, and be pampered.

And you *did* make a snappy comeback after all. Smirk.

"S-squeak! *(C-curses!)*"

"You two sure seem friendly. No clue what you could be talking about, though."

"Squeak, squeak-squeak. *(Oh? So you realize he and I are deeply in love with each other? Yes, yes. Well, you are certainly understanding for a human male.)*"

Nobody said anything about mutual love! Len's ears make up the most convenient things sometimes.

"Anyway, young ladies, you should be getting back, too."

“Okay!”

“I understand.”

In that case, come right up onto my back, young ladies. The forest isn’t exactly paved, so it’s hard to walk through. The ground is spotted with tree roots and stones, there’s soft parts and hard parts, and it’s uneven. Walking on your own two feet is sure to get you hurt.

Yes, and I’m certainly not letting you two on my back because I want you to sit on me with your butts or anything lewd like that—it’s just heartfelt friendliness.

“Squeak. *(The fact that you’re making excuses means it’s already lewd.)*”

Quiet, quiet! I lower myself, and the two young ladies sit astride on my back, one in front of the other.

“Thank you very much, Routa.”

“If you will excuse me.”

“Arf, arf. *(Just leave it to me.)*”

I push up on my limbs to slowly rise.

“Arf. *(Whoops, I can’t forget about that.)*”

The old man brought three buckets along. While he carries two, I carry the other in my mouth. The young ladies are totally light, and this bucket doesn’t weigh much with only crabs in it. What an easy gig.

“How do you plan to prepare these crabs?” asks Drills as the old man walks alongside us.

For all she was calling them cute, she doesn’t seem to have any qualms about eating them. That’s a good thing. We live by eating other life, so feeling sorry for it would be egotistical.

“River crabs generally don’t have much on them to eat, so I’ll make a stock out of them. Using that as a base when making mousse, cream, or sauce, it’ll give it a nice umami flavor. Just mixing it in will make it smell, though, so I will need to use a trick or two.”

“Oh, that’s amazing! You use a lot of tricks to make your cooking delicious, huh?”

"I, too, find myself unable to wait for meals every day."

Yeah, same here. The old man's cooking is just too good. Once I eat breakfast, I can't wait for lunch, and once I'm done with lunch, I'm looking forward to dinner. I wouldn't have the will to live without his cooking.

"And when I chanced to hear your name, I thought I might pass out. To think the court chef spoken so highly of as to be considered a fantasy had left the Royal Capital and was living in a place like this... If word of this were to spread to the nobles, they would begin madly requesting permission from Lord Gandolf to meet with you."

"I mean, your praise honors me, but I've still got a long way to go. There's so much more for me to learn, you see."

From what I've heard, the old man worked as the head chef at the royal court when he was younger. Now he devotes himself to procuring all his own ingredients, working late every night to come up with new dishes and striving to improve his skills.

"I know I say this in front of Mary, but do you have any intention of returning to the capital? I very much wish to let many more people taste the cooking you create. And you would certainly have no shortage of investors were you to open your own shop."

With his skills, that would definitely be possible. But it wouldn't be very good. No, it would be very bad.

Without the old man here, who would make food for the mansion? Not being able to eat his cooking anymore? I couldn't stand it!

Old man! Please don't go!

"I do not, unfortunately," the old man answers decisively. "I owe a major debt to Lord Gandolf, and I don't want to leave the young lady's nutritional management in someone else's hands. The servants are all good people, too. I'm allowed to be as free as I want, and I can stock up on as many rare ingredients as I wish. I couldn't find a better workplace anywhere."

The old man grins, then pats me on the head. "Besides, I'm the only one who can satisfy this glutton here. I could never kick him to the curb and go to the capital."

"A-arf...! (*O-old man...!*)"

I feel like I'm about to burst into tears at the old man's warm words.

"Woof, woof! (*I love you, old man! I'll be by your side forever!*)"

I wag my tail so hard it might rip off.

"I was hoping for a stroke of luck to pull you into the Morgan Trading Company, but I suppose it just wasn't meant to be."

Drills, *that's* what you were thinking about? What a scary girl! Well, she *is* the daughter of one of the capital's influential businessmen.

"Still, I am already captive to your cooking. And I would like to visit Mary frequently in the future to partake of it."

"What does that mean? Am I just a bonus to you? Mrrr."

"Hee-hee. I'm joking." Drills grabs the sulking young lady and pulls her into a hug. Truly a sacred sight.

"Did you eat anything on the airship on the way here?" asks James.

"Why, yes. That meal was unique and wonderful as well. Lord Gandolf truly does have an array of talented chefs. It must be an effect of his natural virtue and charisma."

"That would be my pupil. If you like, you can take him on. He goes from shop to shop, helping out where needed. It's about time he settles down somewhere."

"Oh! Well, of course I shall!"

The cook on the airship, huh? I've only heard his voice once from through a wall, but I remember how tasty the food was. He was almost as skilled as the old man.

The old man is such a good master, so casually referring his student for employment. Once his student is working for the Morgan Trading Co., I really hope it lets him participate in product development. If it doesn't do something to

improve that utterly terrible pet food and the portable rations, pets and adventurers are liable to go on strike! The only one who gladly eats that pet food is the ground dragon Drills owns.

“Arf, arf. (Well, either way, now I know the old man is always going to be at the mansion. Thank goodness.)”

Now my nutritional needs at the mansion will be met. Thank you, old man. Old man forever!

“Ahh, also, I did punch that idiot prince for playing with his food at the court, so if I left here, they’d have me executed...,” mutters the old man.

...I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear that. Wait, what the heck was this guy doing?



“Actually, if we only wanted stock, we only needed about ten of them.”

After washing the dirt and mud off the crabs, the old man lifts them from the strainer.

“Arwf? (If you didn’t need that many, why’d we catch so much?)”

We’ve got three buckets’ worth of river crabs. That’s ten times what we need for stock. The old man would never waste any ingredients, so he must have an idea. But what *will* he do with the unused crabs?

“Curious about all the crab left over? Well—I’ll do this!”

Saying that, the old man takes the still-energetic river crabs one at a time and throws them into a large pot of hot oil.

Abandon all hope—ye river crabs will descend into a living, oily hell.

With a delightful *zzzhhhhhaaaa* sound, the crabs’ coloring rapidly changes to a vivid red.

“Arwf! (Eek! That’s crue—tasty!)”

"Squeak. *(Your true feelings are plain to see... That certainly is a scent to whet the appetite, however.)*"

"River crabs are small, and there's not much to eat on them, but that means their shells are thin, too. If you fry them, you can eat them whole."

It would seem the old man is making unbattered deep-fried river crab.

"Have a taste."

After shaking a little salt onto the freshly fried crustacean, he offers it to me. The red crab gives off a fragrant scent, and I chomp into it without a second thought.

"Harf, harf! *(It's so hot and crispy!)*"

This is seriously good stuff. I can crunch through the shell like potato chips, and the inside is shockingly juicy. They're not pungent at all, either, probably because he washed them so well. The only thing making a direct assault on my tongue is the natural taste of the crab.

"Woof, woof! *(Old man, more! Fry some more!)*"

"Ah, you like it, eh? Deep-fried food is a little inelegant to serve to the young ladies, after all. Let's make it a snack just for us."

Heh-heh-heh. It's a secret from everyone, then.

"Does that mouse want any?"

"Squeak! *(I will have some, of course! I cannot let milord have it all to himself!)*"

"Meow! *(Not to be rude, but Nahura is here, too! Wherever tasty things are, that is where I will be!)*"

Len isn't the only one to show up—Nahura appears, too, using her spatial magic.

"Arwf! *(Hey! Now I won't get us much! Have more restraint!)*"

"Oh, don't start fighting. I'll keep frying them up for you all."

Yahoo! We slam our faces into the river crabs being piled onto a large plate.

"Mew-mew! (Ahh, hot! It's so hot! But it's so tasty!)"

"Squeak, squeak! (Indeed, this is quite delectable!)"

It's a simple dish, but the crabs are fried to perfection. If you don't cook them enough, they won't have that crispiness—and if you cook them too much, they'll get too hard. But the outside is crisp, and the inside is juicy. He fries the entire crab in oil, which shuts all the flavoring inside. And the moment you take a bite, it's like a flavor explosion in your mouth.

""Woof meow squeak!! (It's so good!!)""

We eat our hearts out, enjoying the deep-fried snack.

"Phew. There were quite a bit, but I fried them all. I don't need any more, so you three can go ahead and eat the rest," says the old man before cleaning up and going back to his dinner preparations.

"Squeak. (Such a hearty meal. My stomach is fit to burst.)"

"Meow. (Nahura's is, too. I'm so full right now!)"

"Arf, arf. (Oh, come on. You two aren't trying hard enough.)"

I'm still *only* on my third stomach, you know.

"Squeak. (Methinks you eat too much. If you always consume that much, you'll get big again. Which I'd welcome, of course.)"

It wouldn't cause a problem, though, with the shape-shifting technique and everything. No matter how gigantic my true form gets, it won't matter as long as I have this spell. I can keep on gobbling down however much I want.

"Woof— (Anyway, the rest of the crab is mine—)"

I open my mouth wide, but right then, I sense someone's presence. A starved look directed at my back. A passing maid? Or did the young lady sneak away from her studies once again?

"Arwf! (There you are!)"

I turn my gaze behind me. And there I see a pair of eyes peering in from the window in the back door of the kitchen,

which leads to the garden. The eyes' owner has drool streaming from their mouth, and their face is plastered to the window.

"A-arwf? (*Y-you... Wait, who are you?*)"

Seriously, who *is* that? The person clinging to the window has dirty, disheveled hair. They look like a vagrant. I don't remember ever seeing someone like this. I don't know who they are, but I can tell they're hungry.

"Arwf. (*Oh, fine. You convinced me.*)"

I pick the plate up in my mouth, careful not to drop any of the crab, and open the door. It doesn't look like the old man has noticed.

"Arwf. (*Here, eat up.*)"

"Y-you're giving this to me?"

Blue eyes look back at me from gaps in overgrown hair.

"Arf, arf. (*You wanted to eat it, right? Go for it. He who gives to another bestows upon himself, and all that. One day, once you're bigger, you can come and repay me.*)"

"Squeak. (*This one is clearly past their growth period.*)"

"Meow. (*You sure are brutal to make someone so beat up owe you a debt.*)"

"Arf! (*Nothing's more expensive than free! A meal for a meal, that's what I say!*)"

Well, I'm joking about that, of course, but when I look more closely, this ragged figure is a person. A girl. Wait. I feel like I've seen her somewhere...

"Th-thank you!"

The girl begins shoveling the crab in with her hands, tears coming to her blue eyes.

"I'll repay this! *Crunch, crunch!* This debt! *Munch, munch!* One day! *Chomp, chomp!* I promise!"

Don't thank me with food in your mouth. As she devours the crab, with the tears and snot getting all over her face, she induces a lot of sympathy in me. Even I, a high-class tongue terrorist, would feel bad licking a face like that...

"D-do you want to lick me?"

"Arf. (No, that's okay.)"

If anything, I'm the sort who wants to lick those who *don't* want it. I lose my energy if they tell me to bring it on.

"Arf, arf. (Also, I just realized something.)"

"What?"

"Arwf? (You can understand what I'm saying, right?)"

"Mm-hmm. Didn't I say that before? Don't tell me you forgot about me..."

I didn't forget or anything. I definitely wasn't acquainted with anyone this dirty— Hmm?

"Arwf. (Excuse me a moment.)"

I use my front paw to sweep her overgrown bangs out of her face. Those smooth features, with that boyish charm—

"Arf! (Allie!)"

Alstera, the Hero. The one who carried that holy sword as the descendant of the legendary Hero.

Well, turns out she wasn't his descendant at all, and the holy sword was actually a magic sword possessed by one of the generals of the Demon Lord's army, but still. However, the magic sword's mental control of Allie was undone, and she regained her senses. I thought she left here quite some time ago, saying she was starting over as an adventurer. What's she still doing here?

And I hadn't assumed she'd be so...poor-looking. Her hair is scraggly, and her clothing is scruffy. Also, she smells weird. Smells a lot more like an animal than I, a dog, do.

"N-ngh..." Unable to stand my stare any longer, Allie moans and squats down. She doesn't stop intently grabbing the crabs to eat, though. They really are delicious. Can't blame her there.

"Arwf. (I think you're gonna need a bath before telling me your story.)"

She must have been peeking in from outside because she didn't want to run into any of the mansion-dwellers. She seems to be in some sort of predicament, so we can't use the bath here.

"Arf. (Which just leaves the elves' village.)"

They have baths there, and they can get a change of clothes ready for her.

"Arwf. (Nahura, if you please.)"

"Meow! (Okay, with pleasure!)"

"Huh? What?"

Leaving the confused Allie aside, Nahura activates her spatial magic. White blankets our vision for a moment, and in the next, we're standing in the middle of the elf village.

"Oh my, Lord Routa! You've deigned to visit us again!"

"Oh, it's the king!"

Aruru, the eldest daughter, and Ururu, the third eldest, who were right nearby, run over to us.

"Would you like to eat? Would you like a bath? Or would you like— Eek! Huh? Lord Routa, you really smell!"

"The king is smelly!"

The elves plug their noses and take a step back. It's not me, got it? I take a bath every day. I'm clean. The scent is coming from the girl wanderer fidgeting behind me.

"Sorry, but could you get her a bath?"

"Y-yes, Lord Routa. If you so decree, we will gladly do so."

"Wow, she'll be worth it to clean!"

One of the elf girls picks up Allie under the arms.

"Huh? What? R-Routa?! What is this?! Where are we?! Who are these people?! P-please help meee!"

Dona dona, do-na do-na.

Allie is taken away.

"Wow, amazing! The bathwater is black as ink!"

"I am baffled as to how you got this dirty. Even monsters keep themselves a little cleaner than this."

"Mgh... This is humiliating on several levels..."

Allie, having been thrown into a big bath made from a hollowed-out tree stump, is being scrubbed clean by the elf girls.

"Lord Routa, while you're waiting, why not have some of this? We just finished cooking it earlier."

They offer still-warm nut cookies to me.

“Woof! (*Thanks, Iruru!*)”

Aruru’s younger twin sister, Iruru, gives me a cookie.

It has a controlled sweetness and a plain taste, but the nutty fragrance comes back up to the nose. They’re good. Especially how crunchy they are—I can’t get enough of that. I really love cookies that have this kind of bite to them, like they’re supposed to.

“Squeak. (*I’m surprised it fits, with all you just ate.*)”

I’ve got room to spare! I’ll eat anything I get. No tolerance for leftovers—that’s my proud creed. I’m confident my stomach will be nice and empty for dinner, and that I’ll be able to take on the old man’s cooking. I keep chomping away on cookies for a few minutes while I wait.

“We’re finished, Lord Rوتا.”

“She’s squeaky clean!”

There stands a neat and clean Allie with all the grime removed. They even gave her a free haircut and put her in elf clothes. Her own clothing and her dirty armor are apparently being washed now.

“Ahh, agh. These clothes... They’re a little drafty, aren’t they?”

Without the armor and with a proper haircut, she really does look like a proper girl. How did I ever mistake such a cute girl for a man? Does that mean my eyes were just as blind as everyone else’s?

Well, they do say pets take after their owners! Yep, can’t blame me!

“Arf, arf? (*Since you seem to have calmed down, do you want to say what’s going on?*)”

“Y-yeah... Actually...”

The story Allie gives us goes like this:

She certainly got started on her journey.

She left the mansion and went south, passed through a village, and traveled along town roads—at first, everything was going just fine. Freed from the brainwashing that had

cast a haze over her for a long time, she continued her travels, feeling light and refreshed.

But then a problem occurred. She encountered a monster.

It was only a goblin—an easy opponent for even lower-rank adventurers to defeat. Even without the holy sword, Allie still possessed the physical abilities she'd needed to freely wield it in the first place. Plus, as an all-around adventurer, she has a mastery over magic. Even if she was unarmed, it wouldn't be an issue. A puny monster like a goblin wasn't a fearsome opponent at all.

That was definitely not what the outcome said, though.

Allie realized something was off about her immediately. When she confronted the monster, her whole body began to tremble. By the time she realized it was out of fear, she'd panicked, rendering magic usage hopeless. As the goblin approached, she even screamed, and then she ran away from that place for her life.

Even after she couldn't see the goblin anymore, she kept running, running, and running. The next thing she knew, she'd come right back to a spot near the mansion.

"I'm disgusted with myself. Without that holy sword, I was nothing but a timid little girl. How could I have forgotten about that?"

When Allie was little, she'd apparently had a meek, reclusive personality. When she inherited the holy sword from her parents, her character had made a 180-degree turn, and she'd become fearless and brazen...

"Arf, arf? (*But that was because the holy sword brainwashed her, huh?*)"

It was Belgor, now fallen to the rank of sharp-edged knife—but once, he was a great demon who possessed Allie's entire clan.

Yeah—if your mind was invaded by a demon when you were young, and then you were suddenly released and went back to your old personality, you'd probably be so scared

you wouldn't know what to do.

Allie had reverted, and now she couldn't go any farther. She was fending off starvation, always sleeping in the wild, finding nuts and grasses where she could.

"Monsters don't come out in this area for some reason, so..."

That's because Garo and the other Fen Wolves immediately hunt down any violent monsters around here. It's safe as can be.

"Arf, arf. *(You should have just come back to the mansion instead of trying to live out in the wild like that. Everyone would have welcomed you in.)*"

"I could never possibly do that!"

"Arf? *(Why not?)*"

"Because! Because...I pretended to be so cool when I set off on my own, I can't possibly show my face to them now!"

Oh. Right. Yeah. I think so, too. The Allie that put on a sharp face, crossed fists with Zenobia, and always acted the first-rate adventurer is gone now. Having such a cool departure, then running away from a goblin and going right back... It would be way too embarrassing.

Well, if I were her, I'd have gone back without thinking about it much. I left all my shame in my past life.

"What should I do...? At this rate, I'll never be able to do anything..."

Allie sits, hugging her knees to her chest and hanging her head.

"Arwf... *(Hmm... I was the one who broke the holy sword, so I wish I could do something for you. I wonder...)*"

"Squeak? *(If she's weaker because she lost the holy sword, shouldn't we have her hold it again?)*"

"Arf... *(You say that, but...)*"

That holy sword is now the old man's knife and doesn't have any of its brainwashing power left. It wouldn't have any effect on Allie right now.

"Arwf. *(I don't think the problem is that Allie lost her*

actual combat abilities.)”

Allie is scared of monsters now purely because of a mental block. And her sword-ordered monster-killing rampages have to be aggravating the trauma. The sword’s mind control deflected her fear of fighting monsters and her guilt at taking their lives, and now all of that has rebounded back to her.

She’d have no problems with living if she stopped being an adventurer and spent her days like a regular person, but that’s probably not what she’s looking for right now.

“Arf, arf? (Allie, what is it you want to do?)”

“I... I want to start everything over. I want to become someone who can meet Zenobia again with her head held high. Not the old me, who was trapped by the Hero title—but someone who can help people because she wants to...!”

Allie raises her head; her willpower seems solid.

“B-but whenever I’m faced with a monster, I’m so scared I start to shake...”

“Arwf? (But you’re fine with us being here, right?)”

“Huh?”

“Arf. (Nice to meet you—I’m Fenrir, the Fen Wolf King.)”

“Squeak. (And I am the blue dragon Lenowym.)”

We *are* technically legendary monsters, apparently. Hundreds of thousands of times stronger than the goblin Allie ran away from. I think.

“I know you two, and I know you won’t attack me, so...”

Hmm. So it’s not that she’s scared of monsters—she’s scared of battle itself.





“If only I had a sword...”

“Arf? (*Huh?*)”

“It doesn’t need to be the holy sword. If I had a good sword, I think I could fight again.”

Is that so? I’m not her, so I don’t know what it feels like, but if a sword is like a protective charm for her—that I could understand.

“Arf, arf. (*Then for the time being, let’s go find you a sword.*)”

“Squeak? (*Milord, do you even have an idea of where to get one?*)”

“Our elf village only has bows and similar weapons...”

No, no—I know someone. Don’t you? A certain swordswoman who owns way more swords than she needs?

As Len and the others look at me blankly, I give them a smirk.

"Arwf, arrr... *(Okay... We have to be...very quiet...)*"

Late that night, in the mansion, I keep myself low and move slowly down the hallway so my feet don't make any noise.

After I whisper behind me, Allie nods without a word.

We're heading for the room at the end of the hallway—Zenobia's room. She has a hobby of collecting swords, and she has many famous blades from all over the world and from all sorts of time periods. There's sure to be at least one in there that Allie likes.

"B-but we shouldn't be stealing..."

"Arf, arf. *(It's no problem at all. They're all destined to snap like plastic eventually.)*"

She gets to test out one fewer sword on me, and Allie gets a sword of her own. It's a win-win situation. Zenobia's collection getting smaller is nothing more than collateral damage.

"I don't think that makes it okay to steal one..."

"Arf, arf. *(It'll be fine, okay? If you needed it, Allie, Zenobia would give you a sword or two herself.)*"

You say you can't face Zenobia, so we just have to make off with one in secret, right?

"Urgh... I have no excuse for that..."

So our Thieving Woof-Woof Band has been formed. And our mission is to pilfer a sword from Zenobia's room and escape safely.

Our members are as follows! Me! Allie! That's it!

Len is already fast asleep in my mane.

"Arf... *(We have to be careful from this point on...)*"

"A-all right..."

I skillfully use a paw to slowly turn the doorknob. Without making any noise, I open the door, then enter Zenobia's room.

The only light is the faint glow of the moon, and Zenobia is inside, asleep. She's hugging the stuffed animal that looks very much like me and has a blissful smile on her face.

"Arf. *(Not letting it out of your sight even at a time like this, huh? Zenobia, you like me too much.)*"

She should just give up the *tsundere* act and pamper me regularly.

"Sorry, Zenobia..." Allie apologizes and starts searching out a sword. "Wow, this one's amazing... It has Kisaragi's name on it..."

"Arf, arf? *(Is that amazing?)*"

"It's impossible to just get one, but even if you were able to buy one, it would cost you as much as a big estate and the land it sat on..."

Whoa. Zenobia, you're crazy.

"I have to wonder if most of her money made in her adventuring days was spent on this one sword..."

She seems to have saved up quite a bit of money, having been an SS-Rank adventurer, but each and every sword is worth an astronomical amount. Don't you think you're too wasteful with your money, Zenobia? At this rate, all the money you got from Papa before is going to turn into swords.

"Arf? *(Anyway, do you like any of them?)*"

"H-hmm. Zenobia was a master who could wield a lot of different weapons, but I could only ever use a wide-

swinging sword and let it pull me around...”

Yeah, the holy sword did belong to the greatsword category, after all. If there were one that size, it would be the black sword Zenobia carries, but that was destroyed when she clashed with the holy sword.

“Out of these, I guess...this one would be closest...”

Allie’s eyes are on a longsword decorating the wall, close to the ceiling. It’s quite a bit thinner than the holy sword was, but in terms of length, it works.

“Ngh, ngh...!”

Allie reaches out to try to take the sword, but she’s not tall enough.

“Arf. *(Heh. Just leave it to me.)*”

If I stand on my hind legs, my head will reach the ceiling. If I can get the hilt in my mouth, I can easily take it from the wall.

“Arwf. *(Heh-heh. Piece of cake.)*”

Perhaps I shouldn’t have let my guard down like that, because I hear the sound of a bed creaking behind me.

“...What? Is someone there...?”

Zenobia is sitting up in bed. She’s holding the stuffed animal and rubbing her sleepy eyes.

“Routa...? Why are you in here...? Is there someone else there...? Who is it...?”

“A-arwf! *(Ah, oh no, oh no, oh no! Retreat! Retreeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaat!!)*”

While Zenobia is still half-asleep, we frantically escape from the room.

“D-did she see me?! Did Zenobia see me?!”

“Arwf! *(No, she was half-asleep, so I think we’re fine!)*”

Mission failed. I think Zenobia will be on her guard next time, so we won’t be able to go in to steal anything anymore. We escape from the mansion and heave a sigh.

“Arf, arf. *(Great. Now I don’t have any idea where to get one.)*”

“Yeah...”

We wouldn't have to struggle this much if Allie would just ask Zenobia directly, but...

"I can't face her..."

Right. I doubt Zenobia would laugh, but I can understand Allie not wanting to show a good friend how pathetic she is now.

Still, she's pretty much the only one around here who has any swords.

"Arf, arf! *(I wonder if she accidentally left one lying around somewhere... Oh!)*"

Suddenly, I think of something.

"Arf! *(I might actually have a lead!)*"

"Really?!"

"Arf! *(Yeah, over here!)*"

I head around to the backyard and poke my head into a hedge.

"Arf, arf! *(I think I tossed it around here... Oh, there it is!)*"

Spotting something shining in the hedge, I get it in my mouth and pull it out.

"Arwf! *(Ta-da! A broken straight sword!)*"

I'm shortening it to B.S. sword. Whenever Zenobia breaks a sword, I always dump it here and hide it. She runs away in shock every time, after all.

If Allie just needs to be holding a sword, maybe this broken one will work.

"H-hmm. I don't know about a broken sword..."

Huh? You mean you need a proper one for this to work? There's plenty more broken blades in the hedges if she needs them, but it looks like they won't be good enough for Allie.

"Meooow! *(Routaaa, it's midnight snack time!)*"

Nahura, as usual after my dinner, falls out of the sky.

"Mrrmrow?! *(Wait, what?! Look at all these broken swords!)*"

Seeing all the swords I've produced from the hedge,

Nahura is surprised.

"Meow... (Nahura has a much weaker jaw than you, Routa, so I don't know if I could eat anything metal...)"

I'm not eating them, either!

"Arf, arf. (Good timing. Nahura, let me borrow your brain for a minute.)"

I explain the circumstances to her.

"Mew. (Oh. So she wants a sword, but not a broken one. How selfish of her.)"

"Urk!"

Quit it, for her sake, Nahura. I thought the same thing, but I didn't say anything.

"Mewl? (In that case, why not repair one?)"

"Arf? (Repair? This sword?)"

You have magic for that, too?

"Mewww. (No, no, none of the spells Nahura can use are anything like that. What about just asking a blacksmith by trade to do it?)"

But there aren't any blacksmiths living around here, are there? In fact, if you want to see *anyone* aside from the people at the mansion, even villagers, you have to go pretty far south.

"Meow. (Well, this is the very back of the backwater, after all. But wouldn't the Royal Capital have plenty of blacksmiths?)"

The capital, huh? I've visited a few times—on a trip with Lady Mary, and to go rescue the elves—but I know she's right. The city is way different from the frontier out here.

The issue is how far away the capital is. Even with Papa's airship, it would take a whole day to get there. More importantly, Allie can't get any farther than this, so she wouldn't be able to make for the capital anyway.

"Mrrrow. (Heh-heh. But you have me, don't you? With spatial magic, it's a single leap away!)"

"Arf? (What? Your spatial magic can get us that far?)"

I thought she could only go to places near the forest.

Also, wasn't she limited by the number of anchors she could set up to jump to?

"Meow, meow. *(Did I not mention how Mistress Hecate improved me yet again recently? She gave me several more anchors as well. I could easily warp us to the Royal Capital, of course.)*"

"Woof! *(Ohhh, so dependable! I'm starting to think it's all going to work out!)*"

"Spatial magic is extremely high-level magic... You're amazing, too. Maybe I should have guessed, since you're friends with Routa."

I think it's more on Hecate being incredible than Nahura. She's a skilled witch who can apparently warp wherever she wants and even manipulate time. The only problem being that I only see her on rare occasions, so she's never here when I want her to be. After all, I don't even know where Hecate lives. One of these days, I want to bust into her house and have dinner at her place.

"Arf, arf. *(Our course is set, but it's late, so let's go tomorrow. Once breakfast is over, we'll meet up in the elves' village.)*"

"Okay. The village says they'll let me stay there, too, so I'll see you tomorrow."

"Meow? *(Huh? Are we skipping our midnight snack?)*"

Gah, you're such a glutton. We're getting up early tomorrow; just endure one night; every single night you come to shake me down at the mansion; have you no shame; we're going to the kitchen; fine, come with me!

"So you're going after all..."

"Mrrrow. *(I love how Routa is so on board with everything.)*"



The next morning, I eat a bellyful of the old man's cooking,

say good morning to Lady Mary and have her pet me, and then go over to the elves' village.

"Meow! (*Routa, you're late!*)"

"Arf, arf. (*Sorry, sorry. I was having trouble getting away from my lady.*)"

"Squeak, squeak. (*Fawning over that little girl as always... Anyway, what are you planning to do today? I haven't heard anything about this.*)"

You were asleep, so it's your own fault. If we're not eating, you're practically always sleeping!

"Squeak. (*And that is, and has always been, my proper lifestyle.*)"

It's always been this way? Guess she's been a staunch shut-in NEET ever since she was living in that cave under the waterfall.

"Th-thank you for all this."

Allie lowers her head. I have to say, it's pretty nice having someone actually polite around here.

She's not wearing elf clothes today, but instead her own washed clothing and armor, looking the part of the Hero, like always. The only thing missing is from that sheath on her back, but today, we're gonna go make a sword that can fit into it.

With her upgrades from Hecate, Nahura can do summoning now, rather than just jumping to anchored locations. So I had her put an anchor on the broken swords so that we can call them whenever we need to. After all, it'd be a pain to carry them around with us. She can save more anchors in memory now, so she's apparently put some on various things at the mansion.

Hey, wait. If she can do that, she has free rein to steal stuff, doesn't she? What an evil little cat. I'm sure she put a few on the sausages and hams.

"Mew. (*Exactly. I didn't miss a single thing.*)"

Okay, that's good. In my mind, I give Nahura a thumbs-up.

"Meow! (Do you have everything? Here we go!)"

With one more meow, the scenery instantly cuts over to the front of a castle wall with a big gate set into it.

"It's... It's really the capital...! How much spell control must you need to teleport such a long distance...?"

"Mrrrow. (Nahura is a highly advanced homunculus, you know. This is a cinch.)"

Not bad. It doesn't really sink in, since you use spatial magic so casually all the time. I guess it really is hard.

"Squeak! (I... I can certainly do it as well! It just takes time to weave the spell, is all...!)" Len hops around, trying to object.

"Arf. (You're always saying stuff like that.)"

"Squee?! (What?!)"

"Arf, arf. (You said once you could fire my beam, too, if you felt like it. Was that really true?)"

"Squeak, squeak! (Yes, it was! I can activate ultimate destruction magic by purposely destroying a spell and then pushing a large quantity of mana into the empty space it creates! I would only need to control the direction in which it fires! It is simple! ...It's just that getting that much mana together is an issue...)"

"Arwf... (Huh...)" I say, picking my nose.

"Squeak. (Nahura I can understand, but milord—what even are you? The amount of mana you retain is insane. It's hundreds of times more than mine, a dragon's, and that's a conservative estimate.)"

Don't ask me. I don't know.

I was pretty sure my wish was to be reincarnated as a dog, but the next thing I knew, I'd been reborn into this Fenrir body. I didn't ask for any of this mana stuff or anything. I don't need any fighting abilities—I would gladly trade in my Fenrir powers for extra cute points.

"Mew. (Speaking of which, will you be all right in that form, Routa? As a cat and a mouse, Len and I can pass, but you're sure to draw attention with your size.)"

"Arf. (Crap. I didn't think of that.)"

I may be smaller due to the shape-shifting technique, but I'm still plenty huge. A lot bigger than the last time I was here anyway.

"Arf, arf? (Could we redo the shape-shifting technique? No, wait—it took a long time for me to get to this state. Will it even work?)"

"Actually, I think you'll be okay."

Does Allie have some kind of idea?

"You should just walk in. Come with me," she says, walking toward the gate.

The soldiers at the gate look at Allie, and then at me walking behind her, and freak out.

"It's... It's huge...! Is that a monster?!"

"Hey, stop right there!"

They point their spears at me.

"Heya. I'd like to get into the capital. Is that all right?"

Allie takes something out of an inside pocket—a card?—and smiles at the gate guards.

"Wh-what...?!"

"An adventurer... I'll need to see your license."

"Here you are. Check it all you need."

They look between the card they're given and Allie, and then even more shock comes over their faces.

"Th-the Hero Alstera...?!"

"In... In the flesh?!"

"Of course. It's really me... I'm not the Hero anymore, though," says Allie in a self-deprecating way.

The gate guards immediately straighten up and salute. "We're terribly sorry!!"

"The ones behind me are my...err, my familiars."

"Ah, I see... Yes, I did hear that the Hero was working solo."

"I apologize for not realizing it sooner!"

"Can they come through, too? There was that rule about not asking the identities of companions in SS-Rank

adventurers' rights."

"Of course! Please go right through!"

My jaw is on the ground as I watch Allie and the gate guards.

"See? Everything's fine." Allie gives me a conspiratorial wink.

The gate guards move out of the way, and we go past them, setting foot in the capital.

"I'm still a celebrity here. We might draw attention, but I doubt any soldiers will arrest us."

Celebrities have it good.

Just like she said, we draw many stares from those on the streets, but none of them make a fuss about me being a monster when they see me. I suppose they think I'm safe because I'm with Allie.

"Squeak. *(Humans are truly foolish. If we were to unleash our powers, we could level this entire city in thirty minutes.)*"

Please don't say such terrifying things. Because we're not gonna do that! We're a harmless and cute dog, cat, and mouse!

"Eeee! It's the Hero!"

"Beautiful today, as always. And even more gallant than most men are... Actually, she seems more *pretty* today than gallant."

"A pretty Hero is wonderful, too!"

A small crowd of women forms around Allie.

"Arf, arf! *(I'm here, too! I'm cute, too!)*" I object, and I try to make myself pleasant for everybody.

"E-EEK! It looked at me!"

"I-is it a monster...? The Hero is bringing it around, so I'm sure it's fine, but..."

"It's so scary... I don't think I want an autograph today."

As soon as the ladies see me, they stop running toward us and give us space instead.

"A-arf... *(That's... That's so mean... I made my cutest face*

ever, too...)"

"Squeak. (Huh? I thought you were trying to intimidate them.)"

"Mrrrow! (Nya-ha-ha! She said it was intimidating! That's funny!)"

"Woof! (Nothing is funny about this!)"

Damn it. Everyone at the mansion says I'm cute!

"Ah-ha-ha-ha. But thanks to you, I'll be able to go through the city more easily today."

I see. Well, that's nice. I'm still hurt.

"Arf! (But I want to make a big ruckus and get petted a lot, too!)"

"Well, I wasn't getting petted or anything..."

"Squeak? (We're here to get a blacksmith to repair the sword, right? Do you have any ideas?)"

"Once we go past another wall, we'll be in Midtown. It has the biggest variety of shops in it. I'm sure we'll be able to find a blacksmith there."

With Allie in the lead, we head for Midtown.

"Arwf. (Phew. It must be morning, because I can smell that sweet bread cooking.)"

"Squeak. (You just ate breakfast. Even I wouldn't be able to eat more.)"

"Mew! (Routa's stomach is bottomless!)"

The old man's food is what tamed me, but that's not to say I've never thought anything else was delicious. They're totally separate things. And the more tasty foods there are out there the better.

"Why don't I treat you?"

Allie buys some bread for me directly from a shop clerk poking her head out of her bakery window. And she, like the others, starts squealing. Allie's like an idol, huh?

"Here you go."

"Arwf, arwf! (Yippee! Thanks, Allie!)"

The freshly baked bread is warm and soft. When I bite into the crispy crust, the fluffy center fills my mouth along

with the steam.

"Squeak. (*Looking at that has made me hungry.*)"

"Mew! (*Routa, please let me have a bite!*)"

That's not what you were saying just a minute ago. What am I going to do with you two?

I bring the bread close to the two animals on my back, and they begin digging into it.

"Squeak. (*Ah, yes—freshly baked bread is truly a delight.*)"

"Mew! (*It's as fluffy as a bed!*)"

As we walk and smack our lips over the bread, another castle wall comes within view.

"The capital is partitioned by three layers of walls. It's so they can defend it even if monsters or another nation penetrates one layer."

The high, thick walls certainly look like they'd need considerable effort to break through. The gate we're about to go through is no exception—the door is made of metal, and so dense it must weigh tons.

"Squeak. (*Well, we could destroy it in a single strike.*)"

Stop making such frightening comments.

"Ha-ha... I wonder if I really should have brought you..."

Allie is taken aback by Len's words.

It'll be fine! We won't cause any problems! Look into my eyes! These puppy-dog eyes!

"Such a sharp light in your eyes... They would probably make children cry..."

Th-that's so mean! I'm a far safer pet than some stray dog.

"Oh! More importantly, I see the shopping district!"

Ignoring my lamentations, Allie points ahead of us on the road.

"Arwf. (*Whoa. There's so many stores.*)"

Clothing shops, furniture stores, and drugstores, along with more unusual ones, like barbershops. Lowtown had a lot of shops dealing in food, like butchers and vegetable

stores, but it looks like the ones here mainly deal in daily items.

And I can see what we're after, too—a weapons shop. I can hear the sound of hammers striking, so they must have a blacksmith who sells what he forges directly. Maybe we'll be able to take the sword there to be repaired.

"C'mon in!"

The moment we enter, a plump lady calls out to us. She must be the proprietress.

"If anything catches your eye, give me a shout—Wait, is that a monster?!"

No, it's a dog. So please put that ax you just took out from behind the counter on the floor. Stay. *Staaay*.

"Sorry. He's with me. Could you let it slide this once?"

Allie explains it to the proprietress, whose breathing is ragged, like she really wants to murder me. The proprietress puts a hand to her cheek and breaks into a smile, her indignant attitude from a moment ago gone like the wind.

"Oh, well, well! Why, you're the Hero, Lady Alstera! Welcome to this shabby little shop of ours. The monster behind you must be your familiar. I've never seen one before."

"Y-yeah. He's something like that. I guess."

Allie, don't stammer. When you lie, you have to be bolder.

"What do you need of us? Unfortunately, we have no sword that could rival your holy sword, Lady Hero, but we do have light and sturdy armor."

"Actually, I came because I need a weapon fixed."

"Oh, a repair? You want us to mend the holy sword? He is going to jump for joy when he hears this."

"No, not that, either. For certain reasons, I don't have the holy sword anymore."

"You don't? What on earth happened to it?"

"I'd rather you not ask."

She isn't able to answer, after all. Hardly anyone would

believe a story about how the holy sword was actually one of the generals of the Demon Lord's army—and those who did would panic.

"Well, I don't mind, but as I said, we don't have any swords that could possibly replace that one..."

"That's okay. That's why I want to get this one fixed... Rوتا?"

"Arwf. (*Okay. Nahura, bring it out.*)"

"Meow! (*Roger that!*)"

With a meow from Nahura, several broken swords fall onto the counter.

"Why, this is amazing. These are all such famous swords—not the kind we'd ever be able to stock here."

"But they're all broken. I'd like to have repairs done, if there are any among them you think you could fix..."

"Excuse me for just one moment. I can appraise the items, but my husband handles the actual smithing. I'll have to ask him first—Hey! Hey, honey!"

She calls into the back of the store, and a large-framed man comes out.

He's on the cusp of old age, but he is very powerfully built; his skin is red from sunburns, and his nose is speckled with soot.

"What is it? Didn't I tell ye not to bother me while I'm working?"

"This customer has business with you."

"Eh?" The husband stolidly walks over and looks at the swords on the counter. "This is..."

He takes one of them and stares hard at the broken section.

"Now *that's* a right odd way to break. Good swords bend without snapping... Ye couldn't get such a clean break without an experienced master giving an expert stroke, and somethin' what provides direct force on the sword from the other end, see."

Whoa, that's crazy. Your deduction is right on the money.

Should've expected that from a craftsman.

"Do you think you could fix any of them?" asks Allie anxiously.

The smith shakes his head. "Most likely not. Ye can't truly fix swords once they break."

"Honey, look, this is a good chance to show the Hero herself what we're made of. Can't you do *something*?"

"I'm the type what never lies to a customer. What's impossible is impossible. Even if I patched it up, it would break again right away, in the same exact place. I'd think other blacksmiths'd tell ye the same thing."

"Oh... I see..." Allie's shoulders droop.

I'd thought one of Zenobia's famous swords could replace the lost holy sword, but you can't fix them once they're broken, huh?

"I could probably make a short sword using the blade left over, but it wouldn't be the kind of weapon a greatsword user like yerself would want."

"I'm really sorry. You came all this way, too."

"No, it's all right. Sorry for taking up your time."

Shoulders still low, Allie heads out of the shop.

"A-arf! (*Thank you anyway!*)"

Hurriedly, I chase after her.

"I'm sorry. I brought you a long way for nothing."

"Arf, arf. (*Well, we don't know for sure we can't fix them. Let's not get upset. Instead, let's put our heads together.*)"

As we're walking around aimlessly, Allie says something to herself.

"I thought one of the swords Zenobia used was sure to give me courage, too..."

Allie really does seem like she was lonely after leaving Zenobia. She invited her along when she first set off on her journey, and she wasn't strongly opposed to me trying to sneak a sword away, either.

"You've seen how I've been acting since we arrived, haven't you? I've been smoothing everything over because I

still look like the Hero on the outside, but inside, I haven't grown at all. I thought for sure I could get a great fresh start without the holy sword. But maybe I was asking for too much."

"Arf... (*Allie...*)"

"I made up with Zenobia, but I've been cruel to my other companions, too."

I heard a little bit about that from Zenobia once. Allie was originally in a party of four, I think.

"My recklessness caused one to be badly wounded, and when I didn't listen to the other's warnings, she cursed me and left. I didn't understand it at the time, but my selfish actions ruined both their futures..."

"Arf... (*Allie... I, umm...*)"

"I'm no Hero... I was always just a big, selfish, shy idiot...!"

"Arf... (*Allie... Listen, I...*)"

"...I'm sorry for getting upset. But I don't need any consolation... It's all the truth..."

"Arf. (*No, not that.*)"

"Huh?"

The person in front of us has been waving at us for some time now.

"Huh?" Allie looks up and sees the woman in a nun's habit waving at us with a smile on her face. "Tania?!"

Who? I'm guessing that's the nun's name, but does Allie know her? It couldn't be one of the companions she was just talking about, could it?

"Tania, what are you doing here?!"

As Allie runs up to her, the nun named Tania gives her a smile.

"It's been a long time, Alstera. Three years, I believe."

"Y-yeah. It's been about that long since you retired."

Whoa, it actually *is* one of her former companions. What a crazy coincidence.

Tania is a gentle, graceful beauty, with a little strand of

wavy blond hair peeking out of her coif. Also—and this part is important—she possesses an incredibly voluminous chest that is simply too large to fit into her plain habit.

“Squeak. (*Hmph. What is so good about those hunks of fat? They only get in the way.*)”

“Arwf. (*A dragon like you would never understand how wonderful they are.*)”

“Squeak! (*As if a Fen Wolf could, either! Why do human breasts arouse you so?! You lech!*)”

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not looking at her that way. Breasts are to be revered. They’re filled with dreams.

“Mew. (*If you like them that much, I could change shape and become a pair of breasts for you.*)”

“Arf, arf. (*No, that would be scary. Also, viewer discretion should be advised for your shape-shifting, so don’t do it in front of people.*)”

As we’re making a nuisance of ourselves, my eyes meet Tania’s.

“Arf, arf! (*Hello! I’m Routa! A harmless, innocent little puppy dog!*)”

I wag my tail to spread my adorable charm.

“Umm... Your friend seems like fun.”

“Routa, Tania is a nun, so...well, she can use magic. And anyone with an affinity for magic can hear your voice.”

“Arwf?! (*Hwhat?! Does that mean she heard all of that just now?!*)”

My words are indecipherable by default, so I let my guard down. Crap. My affection rating is down the toilet already, and we only just met.

“No, no, I’m not angry. I do feel fear from your presence, but I understand that you are not a malicious monster.”

Phew. Looks like she’ll forgive me for saying all that rude stuff on our first meeting.

Tania turns back to Allie and takes her hand. “I’m so glad you seem like you’re doing better than I thought. After not only Zenith but Zenobia left the party, I heard you’ve been a

solo adventurer for the past year.”

“Y-yeah.”

“I wonder if they’re the ones to thank for how well you seem.”

Eh-heh-heh. I don’t think I’m all that great. I do have pride when it comes to doing stupid things, though. I’m second to none in that department.

“Umm, Tania...”

Allie is looking at Tania’s right leg.

“What’s the matter? Oh, are you concerned for my leg? It’s fine. I can’t do any intense exercise, but I can still run, and it doesn’t pose any problems in my daily life. I’m currently in the care of the church right over there. My days have all been fulfilling, even after stopping my adventuring. Please don’t worry about it... Well, that might be too much to ask.”

Allie’s expression is grave. She looks like she might burst into tears at any second. “Tania, I...”

“I was surprised. You seem like a completely different person than before. You don’t seem like the Hero who was always courageous, filled with confidence, standing at the head while dragging everyone else behind her.”

“Yeah... That was a fake me. This is more who I really am.”

“A fake you? I don’t really understand what you mean. If anything has happened, would you be able to tell me about it? As a friend from your old party, that is.”

“A-all right... I don’t know if you’ll believe me, but...”



After borrowing some of the pews in the back of the church, we had Tania listen to Allie’s story.

About how her personality changed due to the holy sword she’d inherited as a child, about how she was slowly

brainwashed by that very holy sword, and about how she recently learned its true nature and was released from its mind control.

Tania listened to it all the way through, gently prodding Allie where needed when she started to falter.

"I see. That must have been very hard... Who would have thought that holy sword was something that dangerous...?"

"Tania, I know it's long overdue, but I wanted to apologize. I was always so reckless, and it took away your future."

"It isn't your fault, Alstera. I followed you because I wanted to; it didn't have anything to do with the holy sword. More importantly, I'm so glad you've been released from the curse. I've been worried about you ever since I left the party."

"But I..., " says Allie, tears in her eyes.

Tania embraces her. "I much prefer you as you are now to how you were before. I think an Alstera who can cry and laugh is more wonderful than a Hero who only seeks out fights."

"Tania..."

"Welcome back, Alstera. I'm truly glad I was able to meet you."

"Tania...! I...!"

Allie clings to Tania's breast and begins to sob loudly. Tania watches over her with compassionate eyes.

"Arf, arf. *(A happy ending! You were able to make up after all, Allie.)*"

Her crying has infected me. We couldn't get a replacement for the holy sword, but just being able to meet one of her companions makes the trip to the capital worth it.

"Well, now that I know, shall we be off?"

Seeing that Allie has stopped crying, Tania stands up.

"Arf? *(Huh? Isn't it case closed now?)*"

"No—it has just begun. Come, Alstera, and stand. Let's

go.”

“Ngh... Where are we going...?”

“You want a sword, right? I know just the person.”



A Hero without a holy sword, a nun, a dog, a cat, and a mouse. Having formed a pretty weird group, we proceed through the streets, Tania in the lead.

“Arf, arf. (*I think I can smell seawater.*)”

The Royal Capital borders the sea on its western side. We entered through the eastern gate, so we’ve walked quite far. We even went past the shopping district, with its rows of stores, and into an area where there are more civilian homes. Mothers trade gossip with one another as they watch their kids running around.

“But did you hear? Apparently, some prisoners en route from the capital to the prison island escaped.”

“Oh, how scary...!”

“I heard there were several extremely dangerous criminals among them who tried to throw the capital into chaos by releasing monsters into the city.”

“What sort of horrible things could they be thinking? I do hope they don’t come toward the city...”

“It’ll be too late by the time something happens to our children...”

It turns out their conversations are pretty grave.

Still, trying to overthrow the monarchy by releasing monsters into the city, huh? Sounds kind of familiar. Where did I hear about that again?

“Squeak. (*You remember. It was from that man who was conning that spinny-haired little girl.*)”

Oh, that’s right, that happened. In the end, everything failed, and Zenobia beat the crap out of him. He escaped, did he?

“Arf, arf. (Well, nothing to do with us. We’d never coincidentally run into him again on our only day here. The odds are just too low.)”

“Mew. (When you say it like that, I think you’re raising a flag.)”

Don’t say that. Once we get a sword fixed, all I have to do is go back to the mansion, eat the old man’s food, have the young lady give me a bath, and then go to sleep. I wouldn’t be able to bear any unnecessary work.

“We’re here.”

Tania has led us to a small house on a street corner. A lone signboard hangs at the entrance to what was probably someone’s house originally.

“Zenith’s Atelier...? Zenith...?”

As Allie reads the signboard, Tania uses the door knocker.

“Zenith! I know you’re there! Come out, please! There’s a familiar face here to see you!”

After she calls out and we wait a moment, we hear a set of footsteps coming downstairs. And then the house’s owner opens the door and pokes her face out.

“What do you want...? I just saw your face yesterday... I was up all night—”

The woman who came out, scratching her hair, opens her eyes wide.

“Y-you... Is that you, Alstera...?!”

“So it was Zenith after all...”

“What do you want now? You know just what you did to Tania—”

“We’ve finished discussing that already, so please stop that,” interrupts Tania, getting in between them. “Alstera is here as a customer today. Treat her like you would any other.”

“What? Customer? Do you even know what kind of shop this is—”

“Yes, I do. I’m the one who brought her here.”

"Why? I don't get it."

"If you'd like to know, then please let us in."

"Come, come," says Tania, pushing her way past the woman. "Please come in, everyone."

"Why are you saying that?! It's *my* store!"

We follow Tania as she placates the indignant woman.

Inside, the place is cluttered and looks more like a normal house than a shop. Blueprints and compounding diagrams of some sort litter the area.

"I'll put on some tea, so the rest of you can sit down at the table."

Tania, seeming as familiar with this house as though it were her own, goes to the kitchen and puts a kettle on a flame.

"S-sorry for intruding."

"Arwf. (*Me too. Sorry about stepping on the carpet.*)"

The woman's attitude toward Allie seems to tell us to leave if we're as sorry as we say.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk!"

How many times are you going to tsk us?

The name of this woman, who isn't even trying to hide her irritation, is Zenith, if I recall. This was Allie's last companion. She left the party not long after Tania got hurt and left, apparently.

"Arwf... (*And she's less a woman and more just a little girl...*)"

She's short, flat-chested, and dwarfish. Her wild blond hair is done in haphazard braids. Considering her appearance, she doesn't seem to be as old as Allie.

In fact, her age has got to be in the single digits.

"I'm a half elf. The oldest one in our party. Got it?"

Seems like we have another person who can understand me.

"Squeak. (*This feeling... For some reason, I feel a sense of closeness with this one.*)"

Right. You're exactly alike—how you look young, but

you're really old ladies on the inside.

"I'm *still* young for a half elf. What are these rude animals even supposed to be anyway?"

After tsk-ing loudly, Zenith suddenly breaks into a crescent-moon smile, as if she's just thought of a good prank, and she brings her face closer to Allie's.

"Alstera, what is this? All your companions left, and at last, you've fallen so far that only animals will be your friends? Heh-heh-heh. Well, a whelp like that is a good fit for someone who doesn't give a crap about her friends!"

If you're calling me a dog, that must mean you're a good person, right?

"I'm calling you a dog, and yet you're wagging your tail like that... You just *have* to be a monster of the highest rank. It's putting me on pins and needles..."

No, I am a dog. Please refer to me as a dog.

"Great, I have no clue what you're even talking about... I'm dumbfounded..."

"Ha, ha-ha..."

"What was that?"

"Eek...?!" Glared at threateningly, Allie draws back.

"Fake laughter to be polite? You're completely different from the Alstera I know. Certainly not the snooty, selfish, good-on-the-outside-but-lives-for-slaughtering-monsters one. Are you *actually* Alstera?"

Those were some nasty things to say. Of course, she only knew Allie when she was under the holy sword's control, so I guess I can't blame her.

Allie can't respond to that, either. She just shrinks down.

"The tea is ready, everyone. Zenith, stop bullying Alstera."

"What? But she's been acting so weird—"

"I can explain everything, including her behavior. I can tell that if I let Alstera try, you'll butt in whenever you have the chance."

"Urk... Fine, I'll listen."

one, too. Tania appears to be the only one not crying, but you can cry with me! I can let you borrow my fluffy chest.

"Oh, well, thank you very much. I will call on you the next time I am feeling sad."

"Arwf. (*Your reservation has been processed.*)"

In my mind, I give her a thumbs-up and a wink.

"Squeak, squeak?! (*What are you doing, flirting like it comes naturally to you?! You should be letting me borrow it, since you're always making me feel lonely anyway!!*)"

But you're the one I've known the longest. And you constantly use me as a bed, so...

"...All right, I understand now. I'll make a sword for you, Alstera!" sniffs Zenith, wiping her tears with her arm.

"Arf? (*Make one? Wait, Zenith, you're a blacksmith?*)"

The signboard out front said ZENITH'S ATELIER, but I don't see any anvils or furnaces.

"Tania, you brought him here without explaining anything, didn't you?"

"Yes. I decided I should let them meet you first."

"Then that's where we'll start. The workshop is up on the second floor. Come with me."

As prompted, we head for the second floor of Zenith's shop.

"At first, after leaving the party, I just planned to retire. Thanks to grinding through all those quests like an idiot, I had a real big nest egg."





"I'm—I'm sorry. I pushed you so much..."

"Don't apologize. I already said it wasn't your fault." Zenith uses the height gap created by the stairs to muss Allie's hair. "Anyway. At first, I was just lazing around doing nothing...but I got bored."

You got bored?

"So I decided to work."

So you decided to *work*?! That's amazing! I'm never going to work another single day in my life. Right now, I get up and go to sleep whenever I want, and I can eat all the tasty food I can fit in my belly. I could never understand someone abandoning that and *working*.

"Gee, sounds like *you* have it made..."

Why, thank you.

"Your lack of ability to understand sarcasm knows no bounds..."

Heh-heh. Pretty great, right?

"Graaaaah! This conversation is getting nowhere!"

Hoo-hee-hee. My bad.

I've been accidentally letting my habit of interrupting people with quips get the better of me. People don't normally understand what I say, so nobody ever reacts even if I say something inappropriate.

"Where was I...? Oh, right. I was bored, so I decided to work. So I opened this shop."

Once we get up the stairs, the first things I see are flasks and drugs, lined up on shelves in large quantities. On a desk is a piece of parchment with a magic circle drawn on it, and on top of that is a series of gemstones, positioned along it evenly.

"Heh-heh. Quite something, isn't it?"

Zenith takes a cape and a witch's hat from the wall, then grabs a well-used staff.

"Welcome, customers, to the atelier of Zenith the Alchemist."

Zenith bows theatrically.

“Alchemist? Didn’t you specialize in attack magic when we were adventuring?”

She’s right. Your clothes make you look more like a mage than an alchemist.

“So what? I only realized it when I gave it a try, but I’m better suited for creating stuff, not fighting. Now that I call myself an alchemist, I mix magic potions and stuff, too, but my specialty is actually metallurgy.”

Metallurgy? Is that where you heat up ore and get the metal out?

“Oh? I’m surprised you know.”

Heh-heh. That’s the first time my modern knowledge has come in handy. Still, this world is pretty advanced, so cheating with what I know appears impossible.

“I refine metals. But I don’t use fire for it. I use magic to extract and fuse metals, and I can imbue what I make with mana. I can make it whatever shape I want, too. Swords included, of course. Basically, my staff and magic circles are like my hammer and anvils.”

That’s incredible. You put blacksmiths to shame!

“I guess. That’s why I’ve worn out my welcome with blacksmiths. There’s a few who will trade techniques with me, but I don’t want to cause any fights. Which is why I have a cozy little shop here instead of in the shopping district. I started it as a way to kill time anyway; the fewer customers the better.”

Allie must be one of those few customers today, then.

“I heard you mention you had Zenobia’s swords, right? They should make for good alchemic materials. She’s been an awful hoarder ever since she was an adventurer. She living on the streets now?”

No, it’s okay—she and I are being taken care of at the mansion. Generally, she does one of three things: take care of her swords, practice swings with her swords, or test her swords on me.

“And they all broke when she tried to cut you. Let’s take

a look at 'em."

"Meow, meow! (*Roger that!*)"

Nahura summons the swords once again. Broken swords scatter across the floor.

Zenith picks them up, inspecting each in turn.

"Huh. This is quite the collection of famous swords. But with this much raw material, I think I can make something close to the size of Alstera's old greatsword."

Oh, that's wonderful! We'll finally be able to get her a sword.

"O-okay. Thanks, Zenith."

"The issue is how...*unique* the steel is in each of them. They were all famous swords, after all. It'll be a monumental task, harmonizing all their special properties and fusing them into a single blade. I've never done a job this intense. I don't want to get your hopes up... There's a good chance it'll fail."

Hey, you don't have to scare me like that. Worst case, I'll just go challenge Zenobia again to get her to break some more.

"You're awful..." Zenith grins, then spreads a piece of parchment on the floor.

On it is depicted a complex magic circle.

"The swords go here, the catalytic gems go here, and for the mana solution, I'll splurge and use mystic waters number five and number six."

She aligns the broken swords and gemstones to form a circle, then sprinkles a liberal amount of faintly glittering water over them.

"Take a step back, everyone. It'll happen in an instant."

Zenith points the staff she holds in her right hand out horizontally, then opens her left hand and points it toward the magic circle.

"*Agua... Eivis... Mora...*"

As she murmurs an incantation I don't comprehend, the magic circle begins to glow.

“Deminu... Duro... Ahre...”

The swords and gems start floating and the mana solution forms a sphere, the former spinning within the latter and beginning to change shape.

“Kahse... Rekto... Skulo...”

Beads of sweat begin to form on Zenith’s brow—this must require significant concentration—and she struggles to keep incanting the spell.

The broken swords melt and try to combine, but they don’t form a specific shape. The metal is like slime, swarming and vacillating within the solution.

“Gh...! Blast...!”

Zenith falls to a knee.

“Zenith!”

Allie hastily tries to support her, but Zenith gives her a look that stops her.

“Not yet. My spell is still intact. But I don’t have anywhere near enough mana. The passions of the blacksmiths who forged these swords are fighting each other. I’ll have to add an ingredient with a large amount of mana in it to quell them...”

An ingredient with a lot of mana in it, huh...?

“Arf? (And that’s all you’d need?)”

*“Yeah! But there’s no ingredient that has *that* much mana packed inside. The mana solution I just used is the best I have! And the spell won’t last much longer! Sorry, Alstera! I don’t think it’s gonna work!”*

Zenith’s face distorts in frustration.

“Arf, arf! (Not so fast! It’s too early to give up!)”

You just need an ingredient with mana in it, right?

“Woof! (Nahura!)”

“M-meow?! (Y-yes?!)”

“Woof, woof? (You said you put anchors all over the mansion, right?)”

“Mrrrow, mrrrow. (Yes, I did indeed.)”

“Woof, woof! (Then please bring me my brush!)”

"Mrrrow! (*Right away, sir!*)"

Nahura gives a cry, and a brush falls out of thin air. Fortunately, it's the one I always use.

"Arf! (*Allie! I want you to do exactly what I say!*)"

I pass the brush to Allie and then lie on the floor.

The women's gazes dart around; they have no idea why I'm doing that.

Ignoring them, I give a bark.

"Woof! (*Go ahead!*)"

"Wait... What?!"

"Woof, woof! (*Brush me all you like! Come on!*)"

I pop my hind legs open to lure Allie in.

"What are you even doing?! Quit messing around! This is an emergency!" yells Zenith in anger, her veins about to burst in frustration.

"Woof, woof! (*I'm not messing around one bit!*)"

It doesn't matter—just do what I say, Allie.

"U-umm, like this?"

As Allie was told, she starts brushing me.

"Arwf, arwf! (*Excellent, excellent! Faster! Harder!*)"

As my breathing becomes ragged from how good the brushing feels, I encourage Allie.

"...Wait, what the heck *are* you doing?"

Ignoring Zenith as she turns a cold stare on me, I confirm the results.

Great. That should be enough brushing.

"Arwf! (*Fwa-ha-ha! You see, I had a secret plan all along!*)"

I didn't ask for someone to brush me just because I was itchy. It was because I needed something.

And when I get brushed, said something naturally gets stuck to that brush: the fur I shed.

"Woof, woof? (*Len said it before, but I have a ton of mana in my body, right? Wouldn't that mean the fur I shed would be a good ingredient for you?*)"

"What...?! Well, yes, I do feel mana. Hesitation means

failure anyway, I guess... No harm in trying! I'll do it!"

"O-okay!"

Allie takes my fur out of the brush and throws it into the watery sphere in which the swords whirl.

The very moment the silvery fur is absorbed into the bubble, it bursts with a brilliant light.

"Arw, arw! (*Whoa, that's bright!*)"

A harsh wind blows around, sending paper into the air and shattering flasks. Static electricity swirls around the water bubble, speeding up its rotation.

"How is that so much mana...?! That just might be enough...!"

Through my hazy white vision, I can see Zenith giving an intrepid smile.

And then the light and wind die down—

"It worked...!"

—and a single large sword is stuck in the floor.

It's close to the shape of Allie's old holy sword, except the blade isn't white, but a deep silver, and its mottled temper pattern is beautiful.

"Arf, arf. (*Go on, Allie—pick it up.*)"

I prod Allie in the back with my head.

Cautiously, she touches the silver sword, gripping its hilt.

"So this is my new sword..."

The greatsword she pulls out has a decent heft to it, but Allie holds it as though it were a part of her own body.

"I can feel Zenobia's and Routa's power... This sword is incredible...!"

"Arf, arf! (*Fwa-ha-ha! It is, isn't it? Much better than that stupid holy sword!*)"

"Hey, I was the one who made it... Though it was your fur that made it all work."

Thanks a million, Zenith! Now Allie's got her sword back.

"Ahh, I'm exhausted...and hungry. Let's go grab some lunch. I just remembered I haven't eaten at all since yesterday."

“W-well then, let me treat you!” Allie sheathes the greatsword and raises a hand.

“Oh? Sounds great!”

It does!

“In that case, why don’t we go to the nearby restaurant on the water?” suggests Tania. “I heard they hired a new chef recently, and they are supposedly very good. It’s a little early for lunch, so it should be mostly empty at this hour.”

In that case, we’ve gotta go.

We leave the atelier, and after Zenith makes sure she’s locked the door, we set off.

“This recommendation of yours—it better be good. You’ve got me excited.”

“It is my first time going as well, so I cannot say for certain. However, I would think you would find *anything* delicious right now, Zenith.”

“You’re not wrong! Ahh, I’m so hungry! Allie, hurry up already!”

“I—I will! I’ll be along in a second!” says Allie, slowing down so she’s next to me. “Routa, thanks for today.”

“Arwf? (*Huh? That was sudden.*)”

“If you hadn’t brought me here, I wouldn’t have even been able to see those two, much less make up with them. I got a sword, and I’m friends with them again—and it’s all thanks to you. Thank you, everyone.”

“Arwf, arwf. (*Heh, you’re very welcome.*)”

“Squeak. (*Well, I didn’t do much at all.*)”

“Meow, meow. (*Routa did come up with the idea of using his shed fur because you said something, Lady Len. I think you contributed, too.*)”

Yeah, that’s right. Without those words, you really would have been a good-for-nothing dragon who slept the day away.

“Squeak! (*That certainly doesn’t feel like praise!*)”

Len, angry, starts batting at Nahura with her front legs.

“Meooow! (*Nahura praised you, though! This isn’t fair!*)”

Allie smiles as she watches us banter, then grips the sword on her back.

“...With this sword, I’m sure I’ll be able to...”



“Arwf!! (*Whoa! This is freakin’ amazing!!*)”

This is just as good as the old man’s cooking!

The shop’s interior is nice and bright, and what with us pretending to be familiars, they let us all in to eat together, which is great. The kitchen is set up so that the patrons can see into it; the open-concept design makes a great first impression.

As I’m looking at them making the food, my eyes meet the chef’s. He smiles and bows a little. Huh? Have we met somewhere before? I don’t remember his face, so it must just be my imagination. The chef doesn’t seem to have any business with me, either, so he returns his gaze to the frying pan he’s holding in his hand.

Anyway, this is good. Len and Nahura are eating their hearts out, too. Given that the restaurant is right next to the sea, the dishes mainly feature fresh seafood, served in heaping portions. It’s the best.

Pilchard fries and shrimp sauteed in garlic. Marinated octopus and dried oysters in garlic sauce. And, as if that all weren’t already enough, a paella packed with as much seafood as it can hold.

Myriad colorful dishes come to the table, one after another.

“This is great! It’s as good as you said, Tania!”

“All of it is simply delectable.”

The three of them have huge appetites, maybe since they used to be adventurers. Emptied plates keep piling up, and food keeps disappearing into their thin bodies.

Graaah, I won’t lose to you!

"Yeah, it's really good... I never thought it would make me so happy to be able to taste things..." says Allie profoundly.

She wasn't able to taste food under the holy sword's control, and she probably never even thought it was strange. She slowly savors each and every bite, having regained her lost sense of taste.

"I'm really glad... *Slurp...*"

"Let's keep in touch from now on. We're no longer in the same party, but we're still companions to this day—and friends."

"Yeah... Thank you, both of you. I'll do my best."

Zenith has tears in her eyes, and Tania smiles gently. Allie swears to them that she'll work hard.

"I'll do my best... My very best..."

But for some reason, her eyes don't seem to have much energy in them. Maybe it's just my imagination.



"Man, I'm stuffed. Never thought breaking a daylong fast would taste so great. Plus I got to make up with Alstera. This day's just been full of good things."

"If you still have time, why don't we take a walk a little nearer the harbor? The sea breeze in that area is quite pleasant."

"Sounds good to me. My shop is just a hobby anyway."

"I have time, too. Although I will need to make an appearance at the guild again."

"Arf, arf. (*We're free, too.*)"

A pet's schedule is basically meaningless, but I do kind of want to go back while the old man's lunch is still warm.

"Squeak? (*You plan to eat again? There are gluttons, and then there is you...*)"

"Mewl... (*Even Nahura can't fit any more inside... Routa,*

your stomach is beyond bottomless...)"

We continue walking, I with two round-bellied animals on my back, and eventually, we see the ocean.

The area beneath the high walls acting as embankments seems to have been made into a harbor for unloading goods. Large boats are tied to the piers, and tons of wooden crates are being brought on and off them. Strong-looking bare-chested men with towels draped over their shoulders are carrying the crates back and forth between the boats and the harbor.

"Arwf! (Thanks for all your hard work!)"

Being a pet with no connection to physical labor, all I do is watch over them in a carefree way. The voices of the freight handlers working up a sweat, their skin burning red in the sun, carries over the sea breeze to me.

"Hey, we still not selling that freight? It's been sitting here for days."

"Nothing we can do about it. Deal doesn't have a set date. And it's a little too big to stow in a warehouse."

"It's so heavy we had to borrow a flotation magic user from the guild to get it off the boat. Wonder what could possibly be in that thing."

"Nothin' dangerous, I hope. It'd be pretty awful if it suddenly exploded on us."

"It's not for us to worry about—we're just common freight handlers. Let's try and get this one boat's stuff unloaded before lunchtime."

""""Right.""""

Apparently, the freight in the dead center of the docks is getting in their way. With a crate that big, the handlers would definitely have to take some detours.

The three women sit out on the embankments, seeming to be talking about the good old days. Now that I've eaten, I'm pretty sleepy. Maybe I'll take a quick nap and treat myself.

"Gwaaaar..." I give a big yawn and lie sprawled on the

edge.

As I stare at the freight handlers at work, using my front legs as a pillow, I spot someone acting strangely.

“Arwf? (Who’s that?)”

It’s a short old man. Wearing red-and-white-striped clothing, he’s moving through the docks as though trying to hide from those around him.

His destination seems to be the big wooden crate the freight handlers were just talking about.

“Arwf... (I could swear I’ve seen him somewhere before...)”

As I’m trying to grasp at the threads of my unreliable memory, Len murmurs from on top of me.

“Squeak? (What? Isn’t that the scoundrel who tried to unleash monsters on the city? Saying something about wanting to overthrow the monarchy? You know, the one the women were talking about in the city.)”

“Arwf! (Oh— Ohhh! That guy!)”

He’s the one who sold Drills a monster claiming it was a rare animal, and the one who tried to get those people in chains to rise up and throw the city into chaos. Zenobia sent him flying, and though he was sent to the prison island, I heard he escaped—but what would he be doing here?

“Meow? (That crate is suspicious, huh? Maybe we’d better stop him.)”

Allie and the others don’t know the circumstances, and the guy could run away while I explained.

“Arwf... (I really don’t think this is supposed to be my job, but...)”

Nevertheless, I cannot let this stand.

I jump down from the embankment. The height poses no issue for my Fenrir body. I land with assuredness and bolt toward the crate.

“Woof, woof! (Sorry, sorry! Coming through!)”

The freight handlers give a start upon seeing me.

“Whoa! What’s that?!”

A dog.

"A monster?!"

A dog.

"Call the guards! No, wait—the adventurers! Contact the guild, damn it! There's a monster here!!"

I'm a dog! A! Dog!

The freight handlers all scatter like baby spiders.

I think it's good that they ran away in advance. I won't cry because they were scared of me. *Sniffle.*

And obviously things will blow up if it turns out there's a whole bunch of monsters in that crate again.

"Squeak. (*Not to worry. One roar from you, milord, and they would all surrender.*)"

"Meow! (*Nobody can stand up to the Fen Wolf King himself, after all!*)"

Their faith in me runs deep. I can hear it in their voices: They seriously believe that things will work out as long as I'm here.

But I don't need that kind of loyalty! I want to be the one *other* people protect! Why do I always get mixed up in trouble?

We approach the target crate. The man is right near it, too.

"What?! You—I know you! Why are you here?!"

That's what I'd like to know. What are the odds? This goes well beyond a spell of bad luck.

If you surrender, you won't have to suffer any pain. Allie and the others should have noticed the ruckus by now, too. They'll surround you and beat you to a pulp. And I'll stand by and watch.

"Gah! But unfortunately for you, I was faster!"

The man dives behind the crate.

"Woof! (*There's no point hiding!*)"

I chase him, but when I look behind the box, he's not there.

"Arwf?! (*What?! Where'd he go?!*)"

“Damn, an obstacle! The plan has already gone awry, and now there’s another hindrance... Am I cursed?!”

I hear his voice, but can’t see him. Did he go into this huge wooden crate? My ears, which are unreasonably good, can barely hear his muffled voice.

“I was going to use a berserk monster rampage to stir mistrust toward the monarchy, then use my team of golems to topple the monarchy in one fell swoop... But my last failure sent the odds of that plan succeeding straight into the privy...”

I just heard the word *golem*. Golem? Like *those* golems? Giants made of stone, filled with power, with a penchant for meditating—those golems?

“But there’s no going back for me now. I must overthrow the monarchy, no matter what sacrifices I have to make. Thankfully, I’ve gotten people to control the golems. Any idiot criminal can throw a hissy fit. I’ll stir up chaos, use it to go for the castle, and then put all the royals to death.”

That’s some incredibly dangerous stuff you’re thinking about.

“Awaken, my golem! Show them all the power of next-generation magical weaponry!”

I hear some booming and groaning, and the next thing I know, the crate explodes.

“A-arf?! (Wh-what the hell?!)”

A giant with metallic skin appears from the crate.

Thick limbs and a round head. Its short and stout figure looks less like a golem and more like an Acguy. It would probably be good for amphibious operations and such. I see the man from before riding its round head, protected by glass.

“Heh-heh-heh! This golem is a magical weapon for military use. In its combat evaluation test, it even defeated monsters of such high rank they have nicknames! You cannot stand against it, no matter how powerful a monster you are!”

“Arwf! (*Yikes!*)”

I jump back out of the way right before being stomped on.

Its movements don't seem very quick, but it looks hard and heavy. If this thing got loose in the city streets, it would cause pandemonium. I could handle things with my beam, but there are still people on the docks. I'd have to wait for them to evacuate before I fire it.

“Hey, stop!”

That was Allie's voice putting a sharp warning to the man.

“I heard everything! You're trying to rebel against the state!”

She pulls out the greatsword we just had made and thrusts its tip toward the golem, her cape fluttering in the wind all the while.

“Arwwrr! (*Eeee! Allie, that's so cool!!*)”

“Those clothes... No! Are you the SS-Rank adventurer Alstera? The Hero?! What are you doing in a place like this?! What's happening?! Why do people get in the way whenever I try to do something?!”

Probably just because most of the stuff you try to do is bad. Allie is invincible now that she has her sword back. Hope you're ready to be sliced and diced.

“Arwf. (*Easy win today, huh? Looks like I won't have to fight anymore from now on.*)”

I feel like a little kid watching a battle between a giant robot and an epic hero as I wait for further developments in the plot.

“Damn! If you get in my way, I'll just crush you, too!”

The golem pulls its arm behind it, then drives it up from below at Allie, plowing up the ground in the process. If you think a slow attack like that is going to take Allie down, you've got another thing coming.

Beautifully dodging and brilliantly cutting down the golem...is what Allie is unable to do. Instead, she gets

launched away.

“Ahhhhh!!”

What?! Allie?!

She blocked it with her greatsword in the instant it hit, but she bounced away like a rubber ball, flying up and over the high dock walls.

“Alstera?!”

“Are you all right?! I’ll cast a healing spell!”

Zenith and Tania, still near the wall, run over to her.

“Heh... Heh-heh... Well, that wasn’t anything special! It looks like the rumors of SS-Rank adventurers rivaling a thousand troops were embellished!”

“Agh...”

“Woof, woof?! (*Allie, are you okay?!)*”

She doesn’t seem to have any notable wounds. But what happened? That attack certainly wasn’t impossible to dodge.

“Alstera, can you stand?! You have to get up before the next attack comes!”

“.....”

Still buried under the rubble from the wooden crate, Allie doesn’t try to get up.

“Alstera...?”

“I’m... I’m scared...,” she manages to squeeze out. “I’m scared... I’m scared, okay? I’m scared of fighting...”

Allie is trembling.

“And nothing changed even though I pretended to be the Hero after getting a new sword... My body starts to shake, my head goes blank, and then I can’t do anything... I’m scared...”

The other two are struck speechless upon seeing Allie’s weakness for the first time.

“Hmph. Hero? You’re just a coward. If you don’t want any of this, then go away and curl up into a ball.”

The man riding the golem seems to have realized Allie isn’t a threat and decided he’ll ignore her and leave the

harbor.

The golem is probably headed for the royal castle, like he mentioned before. I can see a tall fortress to the north of here. It's pretty far away, but with how long the golem's strides are, it's basically right next door. The tall wall separating the harbor from the city is only a step up for it. If we let it go, it'll destroy houses and cause a lot of damage in the Royal Capital.

Leaving Allie, trembling in fear, behind, the golem begins its advance.

"Hey, wait!"

Having stood to block that golem is Zenith, squaring her shoulders.

"Has another insect come to be crushed? I am very busy, mind you."

"Oh really? You won't get past me! You're not getting off easy for hurting my friends! I'm a former SS-Rank adventurer myself! My explosion magic will wipe you *and* your golem off the face of the—"

"Wait, Zenith! Your staff—your staff! You don't have your staff! You left it back at the shop!"

"I—"

Zenith searches her empty hand, then looks up at the golem, and her face pales.

"If you're finished talking, I shall make you into a splatter on the ground."

The golem lifts its leg. A thick shadow looms over Zenith's face.

"Wa-wait...!" Allie raises a hoarse voice.

"No. You can watch your friend be crushed from right there."

With all the weight of the metal behind it, the golem's leg comes down on Zenith.

"Zenith!" Tania lets out a scream.

"Arwf! (*Crap!*)"

Meaning to save Zenith, I start to run, but then I see a

figure moving quicker than me.

A loud impact. The golem's leg gives off a heavy, metallic noise and stops.

"D-don't...you dare...h-hurt Zenith..."

Allie has stopped the giant golem's leg in its path.

With trembling arms, with quivering legs, she endures the weight of the golem.

"Zenith is my friend... She's important to me... That's why I have to save her... Even if I'm scared...even if it hurts...I will save her..."

"Fwa-ha-ha! Big talk for such a pathetic worm! You can both die together!"

The golem pulls its leg back, and instead swings its arms around to punch Allie and Zenith. Several heavy impacts scatter sparks, and as Allie repels the attacks with her greatsword, her face twists in anguish.

"Alstera! I'm fine! Run away!"

Zenith can't move from her spot under this vicious assault. If she takes so much as a step away from Allie, the storm of steel will swallow her in an instant and tear her to shreds.

"No... No! I won't...run...!"

"Alstera..."

"I was no hero... I was just a foolish child...! I hurt all of you, caused you so much trouble...! But I don't want to lose my friends anymore...!"

Her knees knock together violently, and her face is a mess of tears and snot. But Allie doesn't back down. She stands firm to protect her companions, no matter how afraid she is.

"Come! Regular old Alstera will defeat you!"

The sword she holds ready is wobbling, too, and she has no chance to wipe away her tears—and yet she still roars.

Looking exactly like a brave warrior should.

"Impudence! I'll crush you!"

The golem crosses its arms, then slams them down from

above.

"Well said."

And then a voice comes from a spot somewhere above the golem.

"Your words ring true in my heart, 'regular old Alstera.'"

A swordswoman descends, red hair fluttering, sword held aloft.

"Arwf?! (*Zenobia?! How are you here?!)*"

Zenobia's single slash takes off the golem's arms.

"Wh-whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?! But this adamantium armor can even repel cannon shots!!"

Zenobia lands in front of the dazed Allie, then turns back to face the golem and says this, without explaining any of the details:

"With me, Alstera!"

"...! Right!"

With only that, Allie readies her sword, having understood what Zenobia meant.

""Haaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!""

The two dash at the same time, slashing with their black and white greatswords.

Their strikes carve an X shape into the golem as they both run past it and behind.

Allie sheathes her sword, and Zenobia flicks hers to get the dirt off.

And after a moment's silence, fractures appear in the golem's torso. Its body breaks into four pieces and crumbles loudly to the ground.

"A-arwww... (*They... They stole my part...*)"

I really was planning on using my beam to provide support. They took away all the good chances, though.

"No... Impossible... How could my plans have...?"

The man tumbles out of the seat, from which smoke is rising.

"No, not yet...! This isn't over...!"

"This guy's stubborn!" Zenith starts kicking the man in

the gut, but he ignores her and shouts toward the docks.

"Hey, criminals! I'm giving you those golems! Rampage to your hearts' content!"

In response to his cry, wooden crates all over the docks start breaking, one after another, and more golems of the same type appear from within.

"There's more than one...?!"

"Argh. That many may pose a problem..."

"Heh-heh-heh! If you think you can stop them, go ahead and try! Those golem riders are criminals, every last one. I bet they'll scatter in every direction and start pillaging and destroying. Are the two of you enough alone?!"

"Bastard...!"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The man, looking at the seemingly frustrated two, laughs, proud of his victory.

I, on the other hand, am relieved.

"Arwf. *(Oh, how lucky. I won't have to waste any bullets.)*"

The beam, having lost its target, is waiting inside my mouth to fire.

"Woof, woof! *(It's the first public reveal in the nation! You're about to witness my new secret move!)*"

I fire the pent-up beam bit by bit.

"Grwl grwl grwl grwl grwl grwl grwl grwl gra-wooo!! *(Reduced-Power-for-a-Rapid-Fire Beeeeam!!)*"

Spouts of beams angle upward from below, piercing the golems' chests and flying into the distant sky.

And thus was the risen army of golems silenced before it could do anything.

"Arf, arf. *(Good, good. They were all so big I could angle the beams to prevent collateral damage to the city.)*"

"...What? Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!"

Seeing the now-heartless golems falling to their knees one after another, the man, baffled, shouts.

"Be quiet already." And once again, Zenobia gives him a

good hit and knocks him out. “Sheesh. That was enough force to make our efforts look stupid. You did save us again, though. I give you my thanks, Routa.”

“Arwf. (*You’re welcome.*)”

“We made a lot of noise. The guards will be along shortly,” says Zenobia as she pets my head.

I’m glad you’re petting me, but why are you here? Also, how did you fall out of the sky like that?

“I’m a very busy person, you know. It isn’t fair for Routa to have all the praise.”

Floating down slowly from the sky on her staff is Hecate.

“Ma’am!” says Zenobia. “We couldn’t have done it without your help, of course, Lady Hecate!”

“Then will you pet me on the head, too?”

“I... I could never do something so disrespectful...”

Zenobia must have fallen out of the sky by using Hecate’s teleportation to jump here.

“...I had this feeling I saw Alstera last night,” explains Zenobia. “And then, this morning, you were nowhere to be found, either. My gut told me something bad was happening. Lady Hecate had just arrived to check up on Lady Mary, so I asked her if she knew anything.”

“My silly cat sent me an image other than food for once. I teleported here in a hurry, though, so my destination was a little off.”

Oh, I see. Hecate shares a connection with Nahura, so she knows what was going on. And that’s why she delivered Zenobia all the way here for us.

Even so, that timing was far too perfect. Dropping out of the sky and cleaving something in two with a greatsword? That was an *extremely* cool entrance. For Zenobia, that’s pretty unexpected. Actually, the black greatsword—didn’t it get shattered in the last battle?

“What, are you curious about the sword? If it breaks, it restores itself if left alone. It *is* the family treasure passed down for a thousand years by my ancestor Georg.”

What? That's terrifying! It's like a demon sword, and it's way more suspicious than Alstera's holy sword.

""""Zenobiaaa!""""

Allie and the others rush over. The three seem basically unharmed.

"Zenobia, thanks for helping us. If it hadn't been for you, we might have been goners."

"What are you saying? Everyone is safe and sound because you protected them. You did well." Zenobia claps a hand down on Allie's shoulder. "Seriously. I think you're miles better than when you were obsessed with being the Hero. Also, you should see your face right now. It's all crusted over."

Zenith, who is leaning against her with an elbow on her shoulder, takes one look at Allie's face and bursts out laughing.

"Huh? It is?"

"I'll wipe it off for you, so please sit still a moment," says Tania, stopping Allie before she can wipe it off with her sleeve. "This is the first time I've ever wiped something off you that wasn't the blood of your enemies. I'm so glad the day has come that we can do this. And it makes me happier than anything that the four of us are together again."

After their party dispersed, everyone left on her own path, but nobody forgot about the others. This is probably what the four of them were like before they had their issues. Time has restored their old bonds with one another.

"Oh, since we're all together for the first time in a long time, want to go out for drinks?" suggests Zenith. "We're gonna have to go for witness interviews tomorrow anyway. We'll all be free until then, right?"

"Hmm. Yes, that should be fine," says Zenobia.

"Great! I know a place open during the day. The rest of you are coming, too! Zenobia says she's treating us all to celebrating Alstera's return!"

"We split the bill. I will not accept anything else. We split

it impartially to one decimal point. I've been short on cash lately."

"...Why? Did you buy *another* sword?"

"Zenobia never changes, does she?" says Tania.

"That's right, and Routa and the others are included...", says Allie. "Wait. Routa...?"

Allie looks back behind her, but I'm not there.

"Are you sure about this? I doubt anyone would blame you for at least saying hello," notes Hecate after she's carried me into the air.

"Arwf. (*Worming my way into that would be barbaric. I can see them whenever I want. Anyway, I have a very important duty waiting for me.*)"

"Oh? And what might that be?" Hecate smiles mischievously at my assertion.

"Woof! (*The old man's lunch! If I go back now, I can eat it while it's still hot!*)"

"Squeak... (*You never think about anything but food...*)"

"Meow? (*Routa will always be Routa, won't he?*)"

Please—we all know you two are joining me to eat. Well, I'm not sharing.

"In that case, let's return."

Hecate activates her spatial magic, and then white begins to blanket my vision. The last thing I see while looking down is Allie and the others walking and having a grand time.

"Woof! (*Good work, Allie! You should be fine now!*)"

My woof causes Allie to look into the air.

At the last moment, our eyes meet, and in return, she smiles.

"Eliza, you're going home tomorrow?!"

"Arwf?! (*Huh?! Wait, really?!?*)"

Right after the two girls and one dog get into bed one night, Drills suddenly announces her departure.

"Yes. Lord Gandolf has already sent word of the timing of my return. He says he will prepare the airship for me tomorrow morning."

Tomorrow morning? This is sudden.

We're not having a going-away party or anything? It would have been the perfect chance for some good cheer.

"Nooo! I want you to live here with us!"

The young lady goes over my body to embrace Drills. She pushes her cheek around the other's head.

"I knew it would be like this, so I didn't say anything until now. I was in the exact same position when you had to go home after your trip to the capital."

Yeah, the way Drills bawled her eyes out when my lady had to return from her trip was definitely something. But now she's so calm about it. People really do grow up.

"I'll come back again during winter break. It won't be long."

"...Okay."

Lady Mary stops rubbing up against Drills and raises her

face.

"Then let's at least stay up all night talking! I'm not letting you get any sleep tonight!"

I should have known my lady would recover that quickly.

"Hee-hee. Okay."

The two snuggle up and talk about the past until late at night.



My lady, who was breathing very heavily after telling Drills she wouldn't let her get a wink of sleep, fell asleep straightaway, in fact.

Every time I see her sleeping face, it's adorable. Same goes for how she nibbles on my fur like that.

"I should go to sleep, too. Routa, I'll turn off the lights."

Drills reaches for the crystal lamp.

"Arwf! (*Oh! I forgot something!*)" I jump out of bed.

I keep thinking I need to go, but I've never had the opportunity. Drills and my lady have generally been two for the price of one, after all. I could never find a chance to get Drills alone.

"Wh-what is it? Do you need to use the restroom?"

"Arwf, arwf? (*Drills, since we're up late anyway, would you mind giving a little of your time to me?*)"

"You can't go to the bathroom by yourself? You sure are timid-hearted, Routa."

"Arf. (*No, not that.*)"

"Well, you can't help it."

"Arf. (*I'm not talking about the bathroom.*)"

"Let's go."

"Arwf! (*I'm not talking about that!*)"

It would be inconvenient if she *did* know what I was saying, but her not knowing is annoying, too!

"Where are you going? The bathroom is in the other

direction.”

Yes, I know that. I’m not taking you to the bathroom.

“Arf, arf. (*It’s cold outside, so you’ll need a blanket.*)”

I stop by the linen room on the way and drag the blankets out. This fluffy one here should be warm enough.

After bringing Drills outside the mansion, I lower myself and gesture for her to get on.

“Arf, arf. (*My back is ready.*)”

“? You want me to climb on?”

Drills, wearing the blanket, hoists herself up, her legs over the side.

“Arf, arf! (*Then here we go!*)”

“But where are we goooiiinnnggg?!”

I asked Garo about the place in advance, so I won’t get lost. I run like the wind through the forest, lit by the moon.

Ever since my body got so big, I’ve been giving my lady rides on my back, so running without shaking her around is easy. In the blink of an eye, I reach my destination.

“Arwf, arwf. (*Drills, take a peek in these bushes.*)”

“I swear. What did you take me all the way out here for?”

She brings her face up to mine—I pushed open a gap with my nose—and then gasps.

“...!”

What Drills sees is a group of monsters living there peacefully.

They are of many species, but they don’t especially start fighting very much—they’re all gathered here in harmony.

They’re the monsters I rescued. Well, maybe not *rescued*—Nahura was the one who brought them here, and Garo and the others are the ones helping them live here.

“Why, they’re...!”

Drills seems to have figured out who the monsters are.

They include the ones that were being raised at her home, which had slave collars put on them and were passed off as rare animals. Others were rescued from that harbor warehouse.

We brought them here on the condition that they wouldn't make trouble, and it seems they're keeping their word, getting along despite differences in species.





"I see... Everyone's doing just fine..."

Drills has a lot of guilt about having raised monsters as pets. She's probably been worried about them ever since they left. It seemed to her like the monsters had abruptly disappeared.

"Thank goodness... Oh, thank goodness..."

Tears forming in her eyes, Drills nods.

"They're all happy now..."

I brought her here hoping this would lift the burden on her heart a little, and it seems like it worked. Those tears are probably because she's so happy.

"Arf, arf? (*Do you want to go see them?*)"

I let her just watch, thinking she'd be really shocked to meet them, but as she is now, I bet she could probably get along with them.

"No. That's all right. They might remember all the bad things if I were to meet them. Just seeing them safe and sound here is enough for me."

"Arf... (*Really? Well, if it's okay with you...*)"

"Thank you, Routa. You really are extraordinary."

"Arf, arf. (*No, no. I'm just a dog.*)"

"I won't speak a word of this to anyone. This will be our secret."

That would be appreciated.

"The next time I come to play, I want you to bring me here."

"Arf, arf. (*Of course. I was already planning to.*)"

Drills continues to watch over the monsters for a short while, then eventually stands up, satisfied.

"Let us return. Mary may have woken up, and she could be anxious."

My lady never wakes up once she falls asleep, so I think we're fine. But if you're satisfied, then there's nothing more to do here. I'm relieved myself, knowing that the monsters I rescued are living healthily here.

When I put Drills on my back and turn around, the

bushes rustle.

I look over and see the monsters have appeared.

“Arwf...? (*What are you...?*)”

The monsters quietly approach us, then bring their heads close to Drills.

“Are you saying...you’ll forgive me...?”

Drills cautiously strokes their heads, and the monsters accept it, unmoving.

“I’m... I’m so sorry...! Thank you...!”

Drills jumps down from me and embraces the monsters, who lick her tearstained cheeks.

“Arf... (*I’m happy for you, Drills...*)”

The moving sight really gets me in the heart.

But if I may say something...

“Arwf! (*I’ve been beaten to the licking once agaaain!*)”



The next morning, it is time for Drills to board the airship and go home to the Royal Capital.

“Mary! We’re only parting for a short time! I’ll come back soon!”

“Okay! I’ll write you letters!”

“Me too! I’ll write them every day!” Drills waves her hand around from atop the airship. “Thank you, everyone, for letting me stay! If you’re ever in the capital, please count on me to help you out!”

All the servants are waving back in response.

“Routa! I can’t thank you enough! Thank you! Thank you so much!!”

The airship slowly begins its ascent, growing small and distant in the sky.

“Routa, did you do something for Eliza?” asks my lady once we can’t see the airship anymore.

“Arwf. (*I cannot answer that question, even for you, Lady*”

Mary.)”

“Mmmgh! Now I feel like you’re hiding something, Rوتا!”

“Arwrwrw. (*I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about.*)”



Currently, the mansion finds itself in a crisis.

“Hrm. That’s definitely dried out.”

The reason: a water shortage.

“And we’ve *never* had a water shortage at this time of year.”

The river the mansion draws its water from is apparently almost dried up.

I went out with the old man to check on it, and he’s right—the water level has definitely gone down since the last time I was here. That time, I was happy for it since it let us catch so many crabs, but now there aren’t any here.

“The rain is still falling occasionally, so there might be something upstream.”

The old man gazes upstream, in the direction of the sacred mountain towering in the distance.

“Well, it’s not enough of a shortage that we won’t be able to eat and drink like we always do. There’s still water left in the tanks for cleaning. If we conserve our water for a little while, the river should go back to normal.”

Conserve water? How will we do that?

“Baths, first and foremost. Those use the most water. I’d hate to bear the bad news to the ladies, but the servants will have to refrain from taking baths and only wipe themselves off with water.”

Well, there’s no helping that. We can’t have the owner of the mansion, Papa, and the young lady facing a lower living standard.

Doesn't have anything to do with me anyway—I take baths with her.

“Oh—and no baths for you, either.”

“Arf? (*Huh? Why not?*)”

“Every time you take a bath, most of the water overflows from the tub. It's a waste. And while we're at it, for the master and the lady, we'll have them use the smaller tubs they used to use. You wouldn't be able to get into them anyway. If you're going to curse something, curse that huge body of yours.”

“A-arwf! (*N-nooo!*)”

Me, a former Japanese person, not being able to take a bath every day? That's impossible.

“Woof, woof! (*I can't! I can't go without baths! I object as a matter of principle!*)”

“I'll be using as little water as I can, too, and we can't exactly give the horses any less...”

The old man is ignoring me. How sad. He has all those plans in his head, and he goes on muttering about his water-conservation strategies.

Meanwhile, I am in the throes of despair.

“Arwf... (*How could this happen to me...? Baths are for cleaning the soul...*)”

“Squeak. (*You won't die from not taking baths. Before coming to this place, I'd never even taken one.*)”

“Arwf! (*What?! That's so dirty!*)”

Unloved *and* unwashed?! I'm going to have to evict you from my mane.

“Squeak! (*Dragons don't sweat! We don't need to take baths anyway! And I go in the bath with you every time you take one! I'm not moving out!*)”

Oh, right. She's a dragon. When was the last time she went back to her original form? She's really just a mouse now. Also a little girl, sometimes.

“Arf, arf. (*Anyway, not being able to take baths is a problem of vital importance.*)”

The river's water actually started disappearing quite a while back. When Shiro and Kuro went missing, the water level had already gone down. I didn't think about it at the time, but I think the old man's probably right, and something happened upstream.

"Arwf. (What a pain. Guess I'll check it out.)"

At the same time I mutter that, I hear a distant howl from the forest. It sounds like *awooon*, high pitched, with just a little bit of coquettishness. It seems to be calling for me.

"Arf? (Is that Garo's voice?)"

"Oh, what was that? Could that be your wife calling?"

I already said she's not my wife.

"Squeak. (Correct. His lawful wife is me.)"

Wrong again.

"It's all right—go on. I'll be getting back to the mansion. Looks like today is going to be busy."

The old man sets off back to the mansion, the misunderstanding still not resolved.

"Arf, arf. (Whatever. Garo almost never calls for me, so I guess I'll go hear what she has to say.)"

After running toward the area I heard the howl from, I eventually see some Fen Wolves, Garo included.

"Grwl. (I'm terribly sorry for calling upon you. It seemed as though a human man was with you, and I decided it would be best if he were to not see me...)"

Sorry, Garo. Your consideration just made the misunderstanding worse.

"Arwf, arwf? (Anyway, did something happen?)"

"Grwl, grwl? (My king, were you not investigating the lower water levels?)"

"Arwf. (Yeah, and I just figured I'd go check out the cause.)"

"Grwl. (In that case, please allow me to accompany you. The Fen Wolf settlement and the elves' village are facing critical water shortages as well, and some of our pack has just formed a team to investigate.)"

“Woof. (Oh, sure thing. If everyone else is worried about it, too, then I can’t just leave you behind.)”

“Grwl! (My gratitude!)”

“““Grwl! Grwl! Grwl! (Our king! Our king! Our incredibly compassionate king!)”””

...Do you really *have* to fit that in? I’m supposed to be the Fen Wolf King, and yet I don’t understand how my subjects feel.

We decide to all go up the nearly dried-up river together.



“Grwl...! (My king, I am terribly sorry...! Would you be able to reduce your speed somewhat...!)”

“Arwf? (Huh?)”

I look back and see that a very large distance has opened between Garo and me and the other Fen Wolves.

“Grwl...! (Myself notwithstanding, the other Fen Wolves cannot keep up...!)”

“W-woof, woof! (S-sorry, sorry!)”

I wasn’t intending to run that fast, but it’s been a while since I last ran around the forest, and it started to get fun.

I lower my pace and fall in next to Garo.

“Grwl, grwl. (My king, you are amazing. Not only do you stand at the pinnacle of the Fen Wolves—there is simply none other who can rival you. Even if the Demon Lord’s forces were to revive, you would defeat them hands down.)”

“Arwf, arwf. (No, no—don’t give me that much credit.)”

It just makes things worse when you do. My pet life doesn’t need the word *strongest* attached to it. Of course, *cutest* or *most adorable* would suit me just fine.

“Grwl, grwl. (Ha-ha-ha. My king, even your jokes are of the finest quality.)”

Nothing I said was a joke.

As I sulk, the Fen Wolves lagging behind catch up to us.

“Woof, woof. *(It looks like the water’s dried up even upstream.)*”

There are fish left in little ditches and puddles and such; the water level must have lowered pretty rapidly. It would be an all-you-can-catch fishing trip if you cast a net in one, but we don’t have time right now.

“Woof. *(And here I figured some beaver-like animal had made a dam or something upstream.)*”

“Grwl. *(A...beaver? I have little knowledge, and I have never heard of a monster by that name.)*”

I wonder if they’re not in this world.

Despite their cute faces, they’re considered vermin, since they cut down trees and use them to make dams, which affects things downstream. The wooden barriers they build, however, make it easy for new plant life to flourish, and they make the terrain easier for other animals to live in. They may be harmful to humans, but to nature, they’re the ecosystem-promoting civil engineers of the forest. I, once a corporate slave whose only comfort was watching animal videos, know a lot about it.

Still, no matter how far we go, it’s still dried up. We won’t make any progress if we keep on going. I’d like to take a shortcut.

“Arwf. *(Guess I’ll just have to call her.)*”

A handy transporter who will warp here at a single howl whenever I’m in trouble. And her name is—

“Awoooo! *(Hura-emooooon!)*”

“Meooow! *(What is that name supposed to be? Nahura doesn’t have any funny names like that!)*”

Nahura appears out of midair and jumps onto my back.

“Arwf. *(And yet you still responded. Anyway, could you give us a warp?)*”

“Mew... *(Oh, using me whenever you want... Nahura is busy, too, sometimes!)*”

You are, without a doubt, not busy. You say the same

things as your owner.

Hecate seems busy, but you're *definitely* drowning in free time. No doubt. Otherwise, you wouldn't be coming for three meals and two snacks a day, one of which is at midnight.

"Meow. *(Pull my tail, why don't you. Well, they say each night's lodging and meals are worth a debt, so Nahura will bring you where you want to go.)*"

Uhh, if each night's lodging and meals are worth one teleport, you have an obligation to carry us places hundreds of times, you know.

Nahura gives a cry, and the scenery goes white.

"Squeak? *(We didn't specify a location... Where is this?)*"

"Arf. *(Hey, I recognize this place.)*"

A lot of rounded boulders lie on the dry riverbed in the spot where we dug out a hot spring quite a while back.

"Arf, arf. *(I haven't been here in a long time.)*"

Open-air baths have their own therapeutic charm, but the mansion's bathtub is just too pleasant. I always wanted to come back here at some point but never did.

Nahura checks the hot spring. "Mrow. *(It's filled with tree leaves and dirt now, but a little cleanup and it should be usable again.)*"

"Arf. *(Yeah. The water might be dried up, but we dug this out of the ground. If we unplug it, we should be able to take baths in it again.)*"

The water outlet is blocked with a stone. Removing that should cause the hot water to flow again. Maybe we should come for a bath after the investigation.

"Grwl. *(My king, the river would appear to be dried up here as well.)*"

"Arf... *(Here, too... Any farther upstream and we'll reach the waterfall.)*"

That's also where I first met Len. Well, it was more a fight than a meeting, but still. It was a clash of sad misunderstandings and a grand mission, huh, Len?

"Squeak. (No, I remember that as being the most nonsensical fight the world has ever seen.)"

What are you saying? A passionate clash between the souls of a tongue terrorist and a friendless woman... What part of that is—? Yeah, that was nonsensical. Completely and utterly nonsensical. If not for that fight, I probably never would have met this self-proclaimed "lawful wife" and millennium-old friendless dragon who now lives in my mane.

"Squeak. (Not to worry. I will never leave your side for as long as I live. Now and forever, my place is with you.)"

Hm? Do I hear a stubborn flea? I do get bitten on occasion.

"...Arwf? (...Hm? What? Does this seem strange to anyone else?)"

Sensing something out of place, I scan my surroundings.

"Meow. (I don't think you being strange is something that only started today, Routa.)"

"Arf. (Forget the naturally rude and useless cat. I can't hear the sound. Isn't that weird?)"

"Grwl? (What sound?)"

Len's roost is pretty close, to the north. The cave collapsed because of our battle, but that doesn't mean the whole thing is gone. There should still be a big waterfall there.

"Squeak! (I see! The sound of the waterfall! I cannot hear even a drop of water falling!)"

Don't tell me the waterfall dried up, too. That would make this an emergency. If that much water is stopped up, the rapid decrease of the water level makes perfect sense.

"Woof! (Let's go check it out!)"

"Grwl! (Yes, sir! I will accompany you!)"

We kick off the stones on the dry riverbed, dashing for the waterfall.



“Arf... (You gotta be kidding...)”

The waterfall, which spewed all that water from a location so high you had to crane your neck to see it, is totally dry—not even a drop of water is flowing.

“Grwl... (It would appear the root cause is even farther north...)”

North of here? But that would mean we’d have to scale the sacred mountain.

With winter approaching, the mountain has already started growing a blanket of snow, and white winds billow from the summit.

“Arww... (Whoa, that looks cold... I really don’t want to climb that...)”

I sit on my rear end. Garo and the Fen Wolves stand in front of me.

“Grwl, grwl. (My king, please wait here. We have never ventured farther than this, either, but we cannot allow any harm to befall you. Please use us as your outriders.)”

“Arwf. (I couldn’t possibly do that.)”

Every fiber of my being wants to skip out on them, but I can’t let Garo and the others go somewhere that looks so cold all by themselves.

“Arf, arf. (Let’s just try getting as far as we can for now. If it seems impossible, we can just go back.)”

“G-grwl...?! (M-my king, you would come for our sakes...?!)”

Well, I doubt you guys would be able to do it alone, so I can’t abandon you. Also, whenever problems like this come up, it usually has to do with the Demon Lord’s army. I’ve been getting a bad tingly feeling for a while now.

We jump up the half-destroyed waterfall and ascend. The crags sticking out are still a little moist, which means the water’s disappearance must be very recent.

“Arwf. (It’s so cold, it’s like the season suddenly switched.)”

North of the waterfall, not even trees are growing; the freezing chill alone dominates the mountain. Hecate was taking ice from this mountain during the summertime, wasn’t she? That humongous chunk of clear ice suffered a fluffy shaved-ice fate at the old man’s hands. Recalling that cool moment in the terribly hot summer season, I shiver. That wasn’t what I needed to remember right now, in this cold.

“Arwrwrwrwrwrw... (S-s-s-s-so cold... We’ve only climbed a little, and it’s freezing...)”

“Meow... (Lady Len, Lady Len, please, if you could just squeeze over a little bit...)”

“Squeak. (What is this? This mane belongs to me. I expect you to have a little more restraint.)”

“Woof! (No, this mane is mine!)”

Nahura and Len quickly burrowed into my mane to get warm. My fur is pretty thick, but it’s arctic up here. My breath turns white upon leaving my mouth and is carried away by the wind before even a moment has passed.

“Woof, woof. (You two sure have it nice. You don’t have to walk, and you can keep warm.)”

“Meow. (Cats are weak to cold, you know. Everyone knows that.)”

But you’re not a cat, you’re a homunculus!

“Squeak. (This thing cannot be helped. The dragons have always been weak to the cold.)”

Right. Reptiles can’t move when it’s cold, after all.

“Squeak! (Don’t compare dragons to common lizards! There are things even you should and shouldn’t say— I-it’s cold!)”

Len pops her face out for a moment, then shudders in the snowy winds and dives back into my mane.

“Arwf. (It’s blowing really hard now. Even upstream of the waterfall, the water isn’t flowing. At this rate, the snow

will bury the river and we'll get lost.)"

Since we've come this far, there's also a chance the source itself has dried up.

"Woof, woof! (Everyone else all right? If you're struggling, we'll pull back!)"

Actually, *please* say you're struggling. Please give me a reason to go home.

""Grwl, grwl, grwl! (This is no problem at all! Do not worry about what is behind you—please continue!)"""

Argh. I'm really hating that toughness of yours right now.

The soles of my feet are already really cold, and my nose is starting to hurt, and my eyes are getting bleary.

Ack, my eyelashes are freezing! And I'm about to sneeze.

The blizzard grows even stronger, and I start to have a lot of trouble seeing in front of me. That's it. Another ten steps, and if we don't find anything, we're going home. I'll warm myself back up in the hot spring, and then we're going home.

"Arf...arf...arwf! (Ten...nine...eight...seven...six, five, four, threetwoone! Okay, we're going home— Yikes!)"

As I take that final step, my face runs into something.

"Arwf? (Huh? Why is there a boulder right in front of me?)"

We've come here following the dried river upstream. I may have been looking at my feet through the snowstorm this whole time, but I don't think the snow has piled up enough to make me lose my way.

"Woof, woof? (Maybe it's because of this big boulder?)"

The giant boulder stands right in the middle of the river. Is this blocking the source of the water?

If so, we move it out of the way, and the mission will be over. I have no idea where a rock this huge even came from. Maybe it broke off the mountain's peak and rolled down here.

"Grwl, grwl. (Moving it would be no easy task... Shall we return for now and mobilize all the Fen Wolves?"

Redarmor's insane power would be useful.)"

"Arf? (Well, we just need to get the water to come out, right?)"

Same idea as digging a hot spring. We just need to put a hole in the boulder. That'll make a direct tunnel to the water source.

"Arwoooooo! (Don't-Want-to-Make-Water-Violently-Erupt-by-Firing-a-Strong-Beam-So-Here's-a-Reduced-Power Beeeam!)"

A hole about the size of my head opens up in the giant boulder.

"Arwf! (Great! The water's about to come! Run away!)"

Everyone backs away from the boulder at my call.

"...Arf? (...Huh?)"

We wait a few moments, but it doesn't look like any water is rushing out.

"Arwf. (That's strange. Maybe I'll go a little stronger.)"

I go up to the hole, then check to make sure I can't hear water.

"Arf! (Oh! I hear something!)"

It's a *zzhh-zzhh-glurp-glurp* noise.

"...Squeak. (...For water springing, that doesn't sound right.)"

"Mew. (Mm-hmm. In fact, it sounds more like water being drunk.)"

Len and Nahura are right; it sounds strange for water bubbling up. Actually, I'm not even hearing it from the hole... It's coming from somewhere else, isn't it?

"Grwl! (Lord Rوتا! Please stand back!)"

"Arf? (Huh?)"

Garō warns me in a sharp tone. At the same time, the *glurp-glurp* of drinking vanishes, and the ground starts to tremble.

"Arwf?! (What?! An earthquake?!)"

The trembling steadily grows more intense. No matter how I think about it, I can tell it's too dangerous to stay

here.

The earth rumbles and the boulder falls, slamming into the ground. The just-fallen snow springs up in a white cloud. Not a moment later, another even *bigger* boulder rises up.

"A-arf?! (B-but how?! No, wait... That's not a boulder?!)"

What I thought was a boulder was actually hardened skin, and the spot I just blew a hole through was the underside of a foot.

"A-arwf?! (Just its foot is bigger than me? How huge is this thing...?!)"

The leg connecting to the foot, the waist connecting to the leg, the back connecting to the waist... I'd thought it was part of the mountain, but now it rises up as though detaching itself from the earth.

Once it's standing on two feet, I get a sense of its entire body. This thing is a giant. A behemoth with arms and legs.

Even though I call it giant, however, it's not even comparable to the golems we saw in the city. You could stack ten of those things and still not reach this creature's height.

It's so enormous that I can't really make out its face through the clouds.

"Grwl! (My king! Look! The water is coming back!)"

I turn around at Garo calling me. The water has started to spurt from the spot where the giant was curled up. The source must be concentrated here, because it's really blasting.

"Woof, woof! (So this giant was blocking the water after all!)"

"Squeak. (It seems to have been drinking all the water welling up, rather than blocking it.)"

Was that *glurp-glurp* noise the sound of this giant drinking the water? It wasn't satisfied with just draining the river; it went to suck up the source itself. How big a drinker is this thing?

“Arwf, arwf. (Anyway, we should talk to it. I hope it understands.)”

And its ears are really far above us. It might not hear unless we really raise our voices loud.

“Squeak? (What? You’re not going to bring it down?)”

You friendless muscle-for-brains. Why do you always think of the violent options first?

“Woof, woof. (We should do everything peacefully. Conflict doesn’t solve anything.)”

“Mew, mewl? (But, Rوتا, didn’t you just blow a hole in its foot with your ultimate destruction magic? Didn’t it stand up because it’s in pain?)”

Ack! You’re right—I did shoot a beam earlier, now that you mention it!

Despite that, though, it doesn’t seem to be in pain. It’s just standing there idly now.

“Ssssssssssss!!”

Just when I think that, the giant starts breathing in.

Its lungs have an incredible capacity, even sucking up the clouds overhead. With such force as to give the illusion that the air here has grown thinner, it accumulates more air in its lungs.

“Sq-squeak? (Wh-what is this? What is it going to do?)”

I don’t know, either. After the giant takes its breath, it opens its mouth wide.

“Thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat reeeeeeeeeeeally huuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurts!!”

Its voice booms, echoing through the mountains.

“A-arwwwf! (Qu-quit being so loud!)”

It sucks that I don’t have hands to cover my ears with.

I look at Garo and the others to see if they’re okay. They’ve flopped their ears down to guard against the noise. Wait, that’s really cool! How do you do that? Please teach me later.

“Woof, woof?! (Wait, now it’s hurting?!)”

How hardheaded can this thing be? Maybe the pain takes

a while to reach the brain because of how big it is.

"Meow. (I wonder who Mr. Giant here is.)"

"Squeak. (It is likely to be someone from the Demon Lord's forces. The remaining generals were Gigas, the giant commander, and Behemoth, war demon and king of beasts, yes? This one must be the so-called Gigas.)"

"Arwf. (Yeah, I guess you're right. Does that mean a fight is inevitable?)"

But wait a minute. Is it really okay to launch an attack without waiting for confirmation? There's a possibility this is a nice giant who just happens to look exactly like Gigas.

"Squeak? (Is that truly a possibility?)"

"Mewl. (He's trying to avoid fighting at all costs.)"

Obviously. I'm scared of fighting!

"Grwl. (Truly, only our king would show such compassion to a dastard who would drain a river.)"

""Grwl! Grwl! Grwl! (Our king! Our king! Our deeply compassionate king!)""

I can feel the mysterious but regularly scheduled heightening of the Fen Wolves' rating of me.

"Squeak? (But how do you plan to get confirmation? If you speak to him, will he answer?)"

With something that took a few minutes to feel sudden pain, I have no idea how long a conversation will take.

"Arf, arf? (In that case, can't we just ask someone who knows this thing?)"

"Squeak? (Who would know?)"

Generals of the Demon Lord's army would know other generals, right?

"Arwf! (Which means... Mircalla, come on down!)"

"Meow. (You'd like me to summon her? Coming right up.)"

With a cry from Nahura, the former vampire and blond-haired maid is immediately summoned here.

“Hmm-hm-hmm ♪ My bed-making is perfect again today! You will rue the day you had to sleep soundly with crisp sheets and fluffy pillows, accursed humans!”

Mircalla, who seems to have been in the middle of work, dusts off her hands in satisfaction, then lets out a shriek at the polar region she’s just been called to.

“Eeeeeeeeeek!! What the heck?! Where am I? And why is it so *cold*?!”

“Arf. (*Oh, sorry for interrupting your work.*)”

“Y-you again, Fen Wolf King?! Look! It’s *very* cold! Get over here right now!”

All right, all right. I approach Mircalla, who is trembling in the cold, and she desperately clings to my chest fur.

“Phew... I feel a little calmer now...”

Mircalla is very cute, entranced by the warm fluff she’s buried in.

“Anyway, what on earth is going on? I still have work to do, you know.”

“Arf, arf. (*Sorry for all the suddenness. Would that giant happen to be someone you know, Mircalla?*)”

“What? What giant are we talking about...?”

I point him out with my nose, and Mircalla cranes her back to look up at him.

“Why, that’s Gigas! You’re back to life, too!”

Oh—looks like that’s definitely the Demon Lord’s general.

“Gigas! It’s me! The vampire princess Carmilla! ...I’m a little smaller right now, but you can tell who I am, right?!”

Are you sure he can tell? Your appearance is one thing, but you don’t have a scrap of mana left.

Gigas’s face is distinct now, since he even breathed in the clouds covering his face when he inhaled.

A single large eye and a horn growing from the top of his head. If he carried a club and wore furs, it would have been a perfect match...though I won’t say to what.

“Gigas! Hey, are you listening to me?!”

I wonder if it’s asking too much for your voice to reach

him in this blizzard, Mircalla.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.”

Oh, did he hear her? Gigas moves his large eye and looks down at us.

“Ihhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...”

Ih?

“...ttttttttttssssssssssssss...”

Ts?

“...yyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy...”

Y?

“...uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu.”

U?

It's you?

“Ugh, every syllable is taking forever! I remember now—this is how you've always been!”

Mircalla is indignant.

Whether Gigas can hear Mircalla's voice or not, he slowly lifts his right leg, thicker and longer than the Worldtree.

Its giant sole blots out the sky, filling our vision.

“Thaaaaaaaaaaaaaat huuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurt myyyyyy
yyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy fooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooot
!!”

It's you, that hurt my foot. I see, I see.

“Arwf? (*Wait, that? After all this, that's what you were talking about?*)”

It takes way too long for us to communicate. We can't even have a proper conversation like this!

“IIIIIIIIIIIIII wiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii cruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu
uushhhhhhhhhhhhhhh yooooooooouuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!!”

“Arwf! (*Yikes! Run away! Scram! Go!*)”

I give the signal to everybody, then scoop up Mircalla in my mouth by her collar and take a big leap away from that location.

Gigas's movements appear slow, but he only seems that way because he's just so enormous. He's actually moving so fast he's almost breaking the speed of sound.

The incredible mass slams down into the spot we were in just seconds ago.

The impact rips the earth up and envelops us all in a blast of wind.



Meanwhile, at the mansion, its master, Gandolf Von Faulks, had his teeth deep in his work at his business desk.

The work must have really piled up, since even Miranda, the maid helping him as his secretary, couldn't hide her own tiredness.

"Master, let's take a break. Trying to fit any more in will only lower your efficiency."

"You're right... Time for a short break, then. I'll put on the tea. Miranda, you can stay seated."

"Please, that's my responsibility. It would be good for you to step away from your desk. Why don't you open a window? It will air the room out."

"Mm. Yes, I am pretty stiff. The view outside should be a good rest for my eyes."

As Miranda prepared the tea, Gandolf opened the curtains, then put a hand on the window.

"...Miranda?"

"Yes?"

"...I can see a giant standing past the mountains."

Gandolf stared outside. At the sacred mountain, towering far to the north, stood a figure. He identified what he was seeing as logically impossible, but his eyes confirmed this sight: It was a giant person.

As he stared flabbergasted at the unbelievable sight, Miranda looked at him sadly.

"Master...you seem considerably exhausted."

"Exhausted... Yes, it's the exhaustion. I had no idea I was tired enough to hallucinate... I'm glad I took a break. Thank

you for your advice, Miranda.”

"I'll be sure to put extra sugar in your tea."

"Ah yes. Some honey, too, if you please."

Gandolf rubbed his temples, then turned away from the window and pretended he hadn't seen what was outside.



"Warrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr?!" (*Whoaaaaaaaaaaaaaa?!)*

What incredible destructive force. A single step, and he altered the mountain's shape.

Knocked away by the blast of wind, we manage to land in a safe area.

“Woof?! *(Is everyone all right?!)*”

All of the Fen Wolves are by my side, thanks to their agility. Len and Nahura are in my mane.

"Ooh, I feel sick..."

I yanked her full force by the neck, and Mircalla's eyes are spinning.

"Arwf! (*Great! We're all okay!*)"

“I am *not* okay! If you’d snapped my neck, so help me...! You can’t treat someone like that just because she’s an immortal!”

Well, you *seem* pretty energetic. I put my front paw on the yelling and screaming Mircalla's face to silence her, then look up at Gigas.

"Dooooooooooooooooon't doooooooooooooooooooooodge!!"

"Woof. (*But if we don't, we'll die.*)"

I might be able to withstand the attack given how tough I am, but I'd probably get buried alive.

“Eaaaaaaaaaaat sleeeeeeeeeeeep!! Geeeeeeeeeeeeeeet iii
iiiiiiiiiiin theeeeeeeeeeeeeeee waaaaaaaaaaaaaay aaaaaaaa
and beeeeeeeeeeeeeeee cruuuuuuuusssssssshhhhhhed!!”

He'll crush anyone who gets in the way of his eating and sleeping? That's a mood. I want to do nothing but eat and

sleep every day, too.

While I'm sympathizing, Gigas slowly reaches out with a hand and rips off a piece of the sacred mountain's peak. Then he starts to eat the hard boulder.

Now that his thirst has been slaked from draining the water, he looks like he's hungry. He seems to take a liking to the flavor of the mountain, and he rips out one boulder after another and puts them in his mouth. His speed is dreadful, and the mountain's peak quickly wanes in size.

“Arwf... (Hang on... If we leave him alone, is he gonna eat the entire mountain...?)”

“Grwl? (And should the sacred mountain be flattened, would he dig into the ground?)”

I wonder. If he never moves from this mountain, I feel like we don't necessarily have to be his enemy.

"Thaaaaaaaaat fooooooooooreeeeeeeeeeeest loooooooo
ooooooooooks taaaaaaaaaaaaastyyyyyyyyyyyy tooooooooooo
o!!"

What, so you'll eat anything? I've never heard the words *that forest looks tasty* in that order. Gigas seems to have expressed an interest in the forest after the sacred mountain. Once the mountain is gone, he will probably start advancing toward it.

“Grwl! (*My king! The forest is where...!*)”

"Woof. *(I know. I guess we'll have to fight.)*"

The forest is where our friends live, and past that is the mansion. I can't stand the thought of this thing eating everything I care about like it's a snack. But with an opponent this big, will my beam work? He was only in pain from having a hole blown through his foot. It doesn't seem like he's been significantly damaged.

“Arwf. (But that doesn’t mean I can sit by and watch it happen.)”

I dig all four limbs into the ground and fire a beam with all my might.

“Arwwoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!”

The super-thick beam I fire strikes Gigas right in the belly, then pierces through his body, leaving a hole behind.

"....."

Gigas stops moving.

"Squeak?! (*Did we get it?!?*)"

Hey! Don't jinx us.

Now that Gigas has stopped, he doesn't even budge. It concerns me that not even a drop of blood is trickling from the hole I tore open. Actually, come to think of it, the hole itself is starting to close, little by little.

"Arwf! (*Crap! He's healing!*)"

"Squeak! (*Keep firing, milord! Fire, fire, fire!*)"

I got it! If one beam didn't take him down, I'll do it with a thousand.

"Arrrrwooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!! Arrrrwooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!! Arrrrwooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!"

I rapid-fire beams.

"Huff, huff... (*I guess a thousand was out of the question...*)"

I'm out of breath with ten. My throat hurts.

"Squeak?! (*Did we get it?!?*)"

I told you not to jinx us!

There's a bunch of holes in Gigas's body now, but no signs of their having done very much, unfortunately. Gigas's body is just too big compared the holes my beams made. They may be piercing his skin, but they haven't done any more damage than a bunch of hypodermic needles pricking a person. As expected, those holes quickly begin to close up, too.

"...Tha..."

After not having moved at all for a few moments, Gigas opens his mouth. A half-eaten boulder falls to the ground, and then his monstrous voice cries out:

"Thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat huuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurt!!"

You're talking about that *now*?! You have some seriously

slow reflexes!

“Noooooooooooooooo mooooooooooooooooooooore foooooooo
oorgiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiveneeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeess!!”

Gigas stomps the ground in anger.

But that's enough to blow up the entire area like it's just been bombed.

"Arrrrrrrrwwwwwwwwwf!! (Run away, run away!! If it hits you, you'll die!!)"

We scramble to get out of the way of Gigas's foot.

Our attacks aren't working, and the giant's attacks are insta-kills. Me aside, the other Fen Wolves are exhausted. How the heck are we supposed to beat something like this?

“Oogh... I got swung around so much I feel like I’m going to throw up...”

Mircalla is moaning with one hand clasped over her mouth. If we keep running around to get away like this, Mircalla will go from bloodsucker to upchucker.

“Woof, woof! (*Mircalla! Doesn't he have a weakness?!*)”

"Wh-why would I tell you something like that—?"

“Woof, woof! *(Please, Mircalla! Please tell me!)*”

“Ah... When you look at me with such earnestness... Fine, then. It would leave a bad aftertaste if anything happened to the people at the mansion, so I'll tell you just this once! You'd better be grateful!”

Wait, really? Guess all you have to do is ask.

“His weakness...”

“Arwf...? (*His weakness...?*)”

Gulp. As I swallow, Mircalla sticks out her chest and answers with pure confidence:

"His weakness is that he's dumb! Really dumb!"

I see! He's dumb!

I know that! You can tell just by looking at him!

“Arwf?! (*Anything else?!)*”

“Anything...else? I—I mean... Well, he costs a fortune in food expenses... If left alone, he would have been able to eat my entire palace, so...”

I can tell that by looking at him, too!

"Arwf! (Damn it! Stupid useless blond-haired loli maid!)"

"What did you just say?! How insolent! I even did you the favor of telling you!"

If you were going to tell me something, I'd appreciate it if it were useful. Gigas being really dumb and costing a lot in food expenses are two pieces of information that have exactly zero use in this battle right now.

"Squeak. (What are you saying? Milord, you still haven't taken this seriously.)"

"Woof! (I'm super serious! I was super serious when I shot those beams before!)"

You grossly overestimate me all the time. What do you want? I'm just a dog who can barf up laser beams!

"Squeak! (No, you still haven't gotten serious!)"

How can you say that so matter-of-factly?

"Squeak, squeak! (Milord, you haven't dispelled your shape-shifting yet!)"

Dispel my shape-shifting? What would be the point of that?

"Squeak! (It's the same as how I can't use my power when in mouse form!)"

Is that why Len partially goes from a mouse back to a dragon when she fights? Come to think of it, Garo is in Fen Wolf form whenever she's serious, too.

"Squeak! (That's right! This is a temporary form meant to restrain your power! Regain your true form along with your true strength!)"

Still, though, you know what my true form is. I'll just get a little bigger than I am now. And since all I do is eat and never exercise, I'm pretty sure I'll turn into a fatty. Even if I bare my chubby round body, I won't be able to move anymore, and he'll just scoop me up for a snack!

"Squeak! (Just do it already!)"

"Woof, woof. (Ow, that hurts. Quit biting me.)"

Either way, we don't have any options right now. I decide

to go along with Len and dispel the shape-shifting art.

I release the restriction maintaining this form that I so firmly decided upon. My body, with the spell lifted, begins to glow brightly, and then—the fluffiness pierces the heavens.



Back at the Faulks estate, break time was about to end.

A porcelain teacup was set down, now empty. The black tea, with plenty of honey in it, had had a deep sweetness that completely ruined the taste of the leaves, but it had worked wonders for a tired body.

Gandolf, lord of the mansion, gave a big stretch.

“Phew. My exhaustion has all flown away, thanks to that tea.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“Then let’s give it another go... Actually, there is one thing I’d like to make sure of.”

Gandolf decided to challenge the window again—the window from which he’d seen the hallucination before. A giant standing on the sacred mountain? Common sense dictated that was impossible. How terribly tired he must have been to have seen something like that.

Physically refreshed, Gandolf leisurely swung open the curtains and the window.

“.....Miranda?”

“Yes?”

Miranda, who had been clearing away the tea things, looked up.

“...I can see a giant past the mountains.”

“...Master... You’re still so tired... It breaks my heart...”

Miranda gazed at Gandolf with grieving eyes.

“No, please listen. That’s not all. Next to the giant is Rوتا, and he’s much bigger. He’s piercing the clouds; he could even reach the stars.”

“...I’m sorry. I’m not entirely sure what you’re getting at.”

Had the master finally gone mad from overwork? Miranda was worried.

“I don’t know what’s happening here, either! But there he is—Routa! An enormous Routa! Look! See?!”

“Please calm down, Master! There is no such sight to be seen! I must tell you that I—I can see it?!”





"You can see it, right?!"

"I can!"

Routa, so gigantic he disrupted their sense of distance, towered high over even the sacred mountain.

"To think we would see the same hallucination...! Could this really be...?!" Miranda balked.

"Could it be...?!"

Gandolf and Miranda exchanged glances, then came to the exact same conclusion.

"Overwork, right?" he tried to confirm.

"Yes, overwork. There is no doubt."

They nodded gravely.

"How could this happen? I had no idea I was this exhausted..."

"It appears I have been pushing myself a little too hard as well."

"Let's call it quits for today. No work. Miranda, you get some rest as well. I give you permission."

"I will do that, sir."

"I must say, though, that is such a ridiculous hallucination."

"Yes, indeed. This has taught me a valuable lesson about the dangers of working too much. I will be sure to take breaks when appropriate from now on."

The two were, as always, blind to the truth.



After being enveloped in a white light, I stood there, baffled.

"Arwf...? (*What? Why does the sky look so dark...?*)"

And the horizon looks like it's bent into a round shape. Also, the air feels kinda thin.

I thought I was just on the sacred mountain. Where am I? After dispelling the shape-shifting technique, I should

have returned to my original form. It wasn't supposed to change where I was standing, but I have no recollection of this place.

"GAROON! (*Milord!*)"

Oh? Len leaps into vision, having returned to her dragon form.

But despite her currently being the shape of a dragon, her size is still that of a mouse. In fact, she might have even gotten smaller. Why did she do a transformation like that?

"Arf. (*What's wrong, Len? You got pretty small.*)"

She's kind of cute, too, flapping her little wings like that.

"GARORO! (*I am not small—you have grown too large, milord! Look at your feet!*)"

"Arf? (*My feet?*)"

I look at my body another time, and when I realize what's happened to me, I scream.

"A-arrrrrrwwwwww!! (*M-my body—it's so enormous!!*)"

My giganticness seems to shun the very world—truly fitting of the name of Fenrir, the beast whose jaw was said to reach the heavens, the one who shook the entire earth.

"Arwf, arwf?! (*Acting cool with my knowledge of mythology from my past life is fine and everything, but how could I be so big?! How the heck did I get to this size in just a few months?!*)"

This rate of growth is absolutely insane. It's a good thing nothing happened near the mansion that required me to shape-shift. I'd never be able to explain this away, no matter how hard I tried.

"Arwf?! (*Wait, wouldn't you be able to see me from the mansion?!*)"

The sacred mountain at my feet is visible from there, so there's no way they wouldn't see me when I'm far larger.

"A-arwf, arwf...! (*Th-this is bad! I gotta get small again, and quick...!*)"

In order to do that, I'll need to defeat Gigas immediately. Where is he? Where's Gigas?

"GARORO. (*Down—directly below you. He is right next to your front leg.*)"

"Arf. (*Oh. You're right.*)"

Gigas is staring up at me, mouth agape.

"Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee's biiiiiiiiiiiiggeeeeeeeeeeeeeer thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaan meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!"

Gigas was so tremendous before, but now, he's the size of a doll.

"Arf. (*Hmm.*)"

I slowly lift my front leg and put it on Gigas's head.

"Woof. (*Here we go.*)"

I put a little weight into it and hear a *crack*.

Gigas pathetically flattens underneath my paw.

"...Arf. (*...Guess that's a win.*)"

He was a powerful enemy who caused us so much struggle, and I defeated him in an instant. Are victories like this really the best way to go about things?

"GARORO! (*Amazing, milord! Quite literally a crushing victory!*)"

Len happily flits around me.

Gigas probably never thought the day would come when he'd be crushed by someone bigger than him, either.

"Arf. (*Well, a win's a win, right? Len, please re-cast the shape-shifting spell on me. I want to go back right now.*)"

"GARO. (*That seems like a waste. I prefer you as you are now.*)"

But I don't! You can't raise a pet this big.

"GARO. (*You could conquer the world at any time if you so wished. You are humble as always, milord.*)"

Conquering the world? No thanks. I'm really enjoying my current life. There's no better life than being a dog raised by rich people. So please hurry up and make me small again.

"GARO. (*I suppose. If you insist, milord, then as your wife, I can only obey.*)"

I don't even have the energy to retort that she's not my

wife. I'm tired from running all the way to the sacred mountain, I'm worried that I was seen from the mansion, and I may have peed myself a little because of how scary Gigas was.

I have Len cast the spell on me again, and after I get small, I go back to Garo and the others.

"Grwl! (My king! That was a marvelous fight! I saw with my own eyes how you crushed that giant to death!)"

All I did was press him a little bit with my front paw, but it must have looked like an amazing force from below.

"I can't believe Gigas would be defeated in such a nonsensical way..."

"Arwf. (Sorry for beating up one of your friends, Mircalla.)"

"...I don't care. I'm not in the Demon Lord's army anymore anyway. And besides, that witch is probably gonna grab him, too."

"Oh, you know me so well."

"E-EEK?! When did you get there?!"

Mircalla gives a shriek and hides behind me. That's a little *too* scared, if you ask me.

"Woof. (Yo, Hecate. Same as always?)"

I wonder what she's going to steal a fallen general's power to use for this time. This happens every time, so I've gotten used to it, too.

"...You never doubt me, do you, Routa?"

That's because I don't feel the need to. Hecate doesn't seem like someone who would steal the Demon Lord's army's power and use it for evil purposes. And I know she's saved me a few times already.

Most of all, I make it a point to never interfere in anything that isn't related to my life as a pet.

"You really are something." Hecate gives a wry grin, almost astonished. "In any case, I'll send you back to the mansion."

"Arwf! (Oh, wait a sec! Instead of the mansion, can you

send us to the hot spring?)”

I’m positively *freezing* because we’re here in the cold. There’s even frost crystallizing on my mane. I’d like to warm up in the hot spring first, at least, before going home.

And we can just have Nahura send us back when we’re done.

“Arf. (Come to think of it, Nahura’s been pretty quiet.)”

I glance behind me and see Nahura has fallen out of my mane and is now still as a rock.

“A-arwf?! (Sh-she’s frozen?!)”



We hurry and launch Nahura into the hot spring. As soon as she thaws, she springs back to life. Like a cheap toy.

“Meow! (Well, now, I am quite sorry for causing so much worry!)” Nahura apologizes, lying on the edge of the hot spring. The rocks, heated by the water, seem quite comfortable for lying on.

“Arwwfff... (I feel like a new dog...)”

The rest of us soak in the hot spring as well, leisurely relaxing our frozen bodies.

“Ugh, why am I even here...? Well, I suppose my toes were pretty cold. I was practically about to get frostbite.”

Mircalla, who took off only her shoes, is swishing her feet around in the hot water.

“Mew, mew? (Mircalla, do you hate baths, too? You’re just like me!)”

“No! I got dragged here in the middle of my job! Also, I still have things to do after this! Send me back this instant!”

Prioritizing your work over this warm, bubbly hot spring? The maid spirit seems to have permeated you.

“Arf. (Well, we’re all warmed up now, so let’s head back.)”

While we were soaking in the hot spring, the river’s

water level recovered quite a bit. We can hear the rolling of the waterfall from here, too.

That should solve the water shortage. The sacred mountain's terrain changed a little, but aside from the scenery, there shouldn't be any problems.

"Arwf! (Okay—let's go home!)"

With Nahura's spatial magic, we warp near the mansion.

"Grwl! (Lord Routa, thank you for once again deigning to save us!)"

""""Grwl! Grwl! Grwl! (Our king! Our king! Thank you very much!)""""

"Woof. (Right. See you later.)"

We see Garo and the other Fen Wolves off, then head for the mansion's front gate together.

"I'll go in through the back. Bye."

So she won't be caught slacking, Mircalla goes off to sneak back into the mansion via the back door. Sorry for summoning you so abruptly. Good luck in the rest of your work.

I, not feeling particularly like I skipped out on my duties, return to the mansion through the front gate.

"Oh, Routa? Did you go out?"

It's Papa. What has he been doing near the gate? Is he done with work?

"I took the rest of the day off. I was so wiped out, I was seeing things. I saw a huge Routa out the window at the sacred mountain! Funny, right? Ha-ha-ha!"

"Arw-rw... (Ha-ha-ha... Funny...)"

Yeah, he definitely saw me when I was gigantic. But instead of suspecting my true identity, he's convinced himself he was hallucinating. I'd expect nothing less from Papa. Your blindness is alive and well.

"I decided it was a good chance to take you out for a walk, but Dr. Hecate was here a little while ago."

Hecate? I figured she'd come to the hot spring once she was done, but she didn't. She came back to the mansion?

“She left this stone statue here, saying something about it being lucky. I don’t care for statues, but I do hope it wards off evil.”

Papa looks up at a stone statue standing there, about three meters tall.

When I see it, I start coughing.

“Argh?! *(Wait, isn’t that Gigas?!)*”

The giant I just defeated moments ago has been reduced in size and placed right there.

“IIIIIIIIII doooooooooon’t haaaaaaaave tooooooooooooo mooooooooooooooooove. Veeeeeryyyyyyyy niiaiiiiiiice. Noooooooooow IIIIIIII caaaaaaan sleeeeeeeep aaaaaaall theeeeeeeeeee tiiii iiiiime.”

Gigas speaks in a voice Papa can’t hear. Despite having been made into a statue, Gigas himself seems happy.

Anyway, why does Hecate keep putting the generals at the mansion after stealing their power?

My land of peace and tranquility is changing into a place infested with demons. At this rate, about 30 percent of the residents will be monsters.

“Oh, Routa! Welcome home! I’m finished studying, so let’s go play!”

Lady Mary waves to me from her second-story window.

Ignorant of how the mansion is steadily becoming a home for monsters, she’s adorable again today in her youthful innocence.

“Woof, woof! *(Gladly! What should we play? Should we play tag? We haven’t played that in a while.)*”

She runs down the stairs and flings open the front door, and I catch her with my fluff.

“Father! Father, do you want to play, too?!”

“Oh, you’re inviting me? That makes me happy.”

“It’s been a really, really long time since I got you to play with me! What a wonderful day this is!”

“It seems I’ve been too engrossed in my work of late. If I’m so far gone that I’m hallucinating, it’s all over. I’m going

to delegate more of my tasks and rest more from now on.”

“Really?! I’m so happy!!”

Lady Mary’s smile is positively radiant. When she’s happy, I get happy, too.

Okay! Today is play day!

“Father, we’ll play tag first!”

“Ha-ha-ha. No matter how old you are, you’re always a tomboy. Well, if I’m going to play, I’m not going to lose so easily. Are you ready?”

“Bring it on!”

“Arwf! (*Yeah—come at me!*)”

We run around the courtyard, playing until Papa drops to his knees in exhaustion.

Without any way for Papa to keep up with the stamina of a child and a dog, he’ll probably wake up tomorrow with his whole body sore and have to rest even more.



Epilogue

“Arw-rw-rw! (*Lady Mary, it’s morning!*)”

Unusually, I wake up before her today.

I gently poke my lady, who is sleeping on the bed, with my nose, trying to get her to wake up.

“Arwf? (*Lady Mary? Are you still sleepy?*)”

“Nn, Routa...”

Huh? She’s awake, but her eyes are unfocused.

“I feel...kind of hot...”

Her cheeks are a little red, too. It definitely looks like she’s sick or something. Did she catch a cold? Well, I can’t stay here. I have to call the maids.

“Arwf, arwf! (*Miranda! Toaaaa! Come here! Anyone!*)”

I go out into the hallway and slam into Toa, who was just bringing in the morning tea.

“Wh-what’s wrong, Routa?”

“Woof, woof! (*This way, this way! Hurry, hurry!*)”

I pull at Toa and usher her into the room. It quickly becomes known throughout the mansion that my lady has fallen ill, and Papa, kicking open the door of his office, runs to where she is.

“Uwoooooooooohhhhhhhh!! Maaaaaaryyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!! Are you all riiiiiiiiight?!” he shouts after running in.

“Master, please quiet down,” warns Miranda. Her gaze is

cold, not allowing objection, and Papa settles down in an instant.

"Father, I'm all right. It's just a little fever."

"And we have the medicine from Hecate for when she catches a fever," says Miranda. "She'll come for a checkup in the afternoon, so there is nothing to worry about. I will wipe off Lady Mary's sweat, so if the men could all leave?"

"Right..."

"Arwf... (*Right...*)"

After being chased out, we pace back and forth through the hallway with nothing to do.

"Mary... Ah, Mary... I'm so worried..."

I understand how Papa feels. It was a big crisis six months ago, too, when my lady had a high fever. Ever since taking the wyrmnil, she's stopped catching colds entirely. And yet now, after all that, she's sick again? I'm worried about her, too.

"I will come back again soon, so please rest your body." Miranda gives a bow and exits the room.

"Miranda, has Mary's fever gone down?"

"I just had her take the medicine; it won't go down that quickly. But..."

"But?"

"The symptoms are very much like her previous fevers. Of course, we would have to ask Lady Hecate for more details, but..."

"What...?! Are you saying Mary has to go through all that suffering again...?!"

"Master, please quiet down. Otherwise, Lady Mary won't be able to rest."

"I... I apologize... But I'm not sure what to do. I hope Dr. Hecate comes soon."

"That is one thing we can't do anything about. We have no way of getting in touch with her."

"Then we'll just have to wait... Miranda, isn't there anything I could do?"

“Well, pacing around here is going to get in the way of us taking care of her, so why don’t you go back to your room and continue your work?”

“Right...”

Beaten by her sound argument, Papa goes back to his office in dejection. Chin up, Papa. Once Lady Mary is awake, you should be there to cheer her up.

It’s so reassuring to have a calm maid like Miranda around. Toa’s not quite there yet in that regard. She just panics, like I do.

“M-Miranda...!”

“Toa, calm yourself. You know what you have to do.”

“Y-yes, ma’am.”

“You and I will nurse Lady Mary back to health. If you tell Betty and the others what you have to do, they’ll do just fine filling in for you. Also, go ask Mr. James for something for a sick patient.”

“Yes, ma’am! I’ll tell them right away!”

Toa takes a deep breath, then nods firmly before heading off at a hurried pace, but not a run, to deliver the messages.

“I’ll have to make a list of Lady Mary’s symptoms... I hope Lady Hecate arrives soon. Not having any way to contact her is an inconvenience at times like this...”

Miranda leaves down the hallway to fulfill her own responsibilities.

“Arwf... *(In that case, I’ll...)*”

...go and sleep by Lady Mary’s side.

That’s what I’d like to say, but there’s still something I can do. I open a second-floor window and jump into the courtyard.

“Arwf! *(Nahura!)*”

“Meow! *(Present!)*”

Wow, she really does show up as soon as she’s called. She must be so bored.

“Arf, arf? *(You can contact Hecate, right? Can you tell her to come right away?)*”

"Mew! (No problem!)"

"Arf, arf? (After that, can you bring me to the waterfall Len used to live behind?)"

The waterfall café is half-destroyed, but there might still be wyrmnil lying around. If I find some and take it back, it should help make the medicine for Lady Mary.

"Mew? (Huh? No need? Oh, all right. Understood. I'll tell him.)"

Nahura is talking to someone—she must have gotten in touch with Hecate.

"Mew, mew. (Routa, my mistress would like to see you.)"

"Arf? (Huh? But I was the one calling her.)"

She shouldn't need anything from me right now, right?

"Mew! (Anyway, she told me to bring you along, so here we go!)"

"Arwf! (Hey, wait!)"

Nahura triggers her spatial magic, dragging me along by force.

The scenery floods white, and when it fades, I'm standing in front of a large tree.

"Arwf...! (This is bigger than the elves' Worldtree...!)"

It's not quite as tall, but it's several times thicker. It could be a different species of tree, but it gives off this sense of presence, like it's been alive for thousands of years.

And there's a large house built into the tree itself, too. They're so fused together, you can't tell which came first, the house or the tree.

"Meow. (Welcome to Hecate's magic workshop, Routa. You're the first one to ever come here.)"

There's a surprise—I'm her first-ever visitor. Nobody's ever come to visit, Hecate? How lonely that must be... I'm so sad for you...

"You seem to be having some rude thoughts, Routa."

Hecate appears from within.

"Woof, woof! (Hecate! I don't know what you need, but we're having an emergency, too! Lady Mary has a fever!"

Could you come look at her quick?!)"

"Yes, I know."

Then come on!

"That's why I called you here, Routa."

I don't understand. Why do you need me here?

"Because we may not be able to persuade the last of the Five Demon Generals without you, Routa."

The last of the Five Demon Generals? Persuade? What's Hecate talking about?

"Routa, you said before that you trust me. Is that still true?"

"Arf? (Huh? That was sudden. Yeah, I trust you. So give me a proper explanation.)"

"Then wait there for a moment, and don't move."

Hecate smirks, then slams the silver staff in her hands into the ground. A shining magic circle unfolds, rotating around the spot where she placed the staff.

"Arwf?! (Whoa! What's all this?!)"

"Squeak! (This spell is...! No! Milord, this is a spell for destroying barriers! Judging by what that witch has said in the past, she's trying to revive a Demon Lord's army general!)"

Why on earth would Hecate do that?

"Arf, arf? (Hecate, you mentioned the last of the Five Demon Generals. Does that mean you were the one who revived all the other ones, too?)"

"...Yes, that's right."

She still wears her smile as her spell expands even farther.

"Squeak, squeak! (I knew you were the root of all this evil! Milord! Stop her! If you attack now, you'll manage it! I feel an overwhelming power from the depths of the earth...! The general to be revived must have power rivaling yours!)"

"Last of the Five Demon Generals of the Demon Lord's army: Behemoth, the warrior king of the beasts. The

strongest magical monster, second only in strength to the Demon Lord. If you fought against this creature fairly, even you might have difficulty as you are now, Rوتا.”

Hecate’s lips part in a provocative expression.

“Squeak! *(This is no time to be dumbfounded! This won’t even be comparable to the generals you’ve already defeated! We must not let something of this nature be revived!)*”





Even Len, with her usual attitude of being the absolute strongest, is practically panicking. The strength of the general being revived must be terrifying.

"Squeak! ...Squeak! (*Milord! Are you listening to me, milord?! ...Curses, fine! I will do it!!*)"

Len dispels her entire transformation and reverts to her dragon form.

"GAROOOOOOOOOOOOOON!! (*Wicked witch, you shall taste my incineration magic!!*)"

Blue fire ignites in Len's oral cavity as the high heat inside it is compressed.

Once fully compressed, the azure flame blasts out of her mouth with a sound like a high-pitched squeal, and at that moment—

"Grahhh!! (*Sit, girl!!*)"

"GARO?! (*Eek?!*)"

At my roar, Len's magic is canceled. And then she flops down on her rear end and assumes a sitting position.

"GARO... (*Milord, this is cruel...*)"

Sorry, sorry. But no attacking Hecate.

"...Are you sure you want to stop her? The revival is nigh, you know."

"Arf, arf. (*I already said I trusted you. Also, this 'betrayal' is so forced it's giving the game away.*)"

"....." Hecate stops her provocative smiling and heaves a sigh. "Oh, you... Even after all this, you still trust me..."

Yeah, that's why I said that at the start. Whatever Hecate is plotting, she feels the same as me about everyone at the mansion. That gives me no reason to doubt her.

"You've beaten me... Now that it's come to this, I'll just have to trust you, too, Routa."

"Arwf. (*Oh, well, thanks.*)"

But I still haven't gotten an explanation yet. Why is Hecate going around breaking all the seals on the Demon Lord's forces? Even if her goal is to have me fight the generals and then steal their power, what on earth is she

going to use all that power for?

"Mm. I'll explain everything, that included. But beforehand, I'd like you to do something about the last of the Five Demon Generals."

Oh—so you're reviving that monster after all.

The magic circle expands to its greatest extent, and the earth begins to rumble.

"GAROOON! (*It's coming! Prepare for battle! Lose focus for a moment and you'll die!*)"

The earth splits apart, slicing between us and Hecate, and from the abyss, a powerful being crawls out.

Even as dull as I am, I can feel that tingling sensation the really strong give off. I understand why Len was so cautious. This one might be bad. I think I'm gonna pee myself.

And then, at last, the strongest of the Five Demon Generals, Behemoth, puts a hand on the broken earth and comes into sight.

What an imposing figure. Covered in glistening fur with a jet-black mane and two sharp horns growing out of its forehead. These qualities remind me of a golden lion. The body of a being born for battle, terrifying and yet beautiful, even, at the same time. Truly fitting the name of Behemoth, warrior king of the beasts.

Len predicted as much—will I be able to fight this demon general and win as I am now? That's how out of this world this Behemoth's power is.

"Grrrr..." Behemoth gulps audibly, then brings its face close to mine.

This creature...is gonna eat me...!

I feel like I'm about to pee myself. Actually, I think I already did, a little.

With our faces so close we can feel each other's breath, I'm frozen in place, too scared to move.

And then, all of a sudden, Behemoth gives a great roar.

"Grrwaaaaahhhh!! (*Looooooooooooooooooooooooove!!*)"

Like a thunderbolt, this rattling cry causes me to shut my eyes—Wait, what did the creature just say?

“Grrwahh! *(I have fallen! I have, in love! With thee!)*”

“A-arwf...? *(Wh-what...?)*”

“Grrr, grr... *(Thy dignified visage, thy beauteous silvery coat, and thy courage, unyielding even in the face of mine approach... Thou hast already pierced mine heart! I have learned what love is! Ahh, what a joyous day! How happy I am! This must be what they referreth to as rapture!)*”

Behemoth is very excited.

Wait, you were a woman?! How are there so many female animals around me?!

“Routa, you sure are popular with the ladies.”

I wasn’t popular with the ladies one bit in my previous life, but now I’m *too* popular. And why is it that I’m not a single bit happy about it?

Actually, I know the reason. It’s because they’re all animals! I am not a furry!

“Hello, dear—if you love Routa so much, then would you betray the Demon Lord’s forces and come to our side? Be aware it will mean giving up your power, though.”

“Grrr? *(Hmm? That would be very simple. The place in which the one I have fallen for resideth is the place where I shall be! From this day forth, I shall live not by strength, but by love!)*”

Actually, that would cause problems in itself. I don’t know how many times I have to say this: I, a pet, have no intention of making a family for myself.

“Grrrrr! *(More importantly— I see, so thy name is Routa! A good name, yes! I heard the very same name once, long ago on the battlefield!)*”

“No effects of the Demon Lord’s contamination—and your memories appear to be somewhat intact as well.”

As I’m trying to look away from Behemoth as she tries to cuddle up with me, Hecate seems somehow convinced.

“In that case, I will have your power. Can I get you to

accept it without resistance?”

“Grrr! *(How tedious thou art! I am no longer Behemoth, god of war and ruler of all beasts. I am but a single woman who doth live for love!)*”

Behemoth makes her promise, and Hecate stabs her staff into the ground. A magic circle unfurls at Behemoth’s feet, and I feel the mana leaving her huge body.

Behemoth’s form grows rapidly smaller, and by the end, she’s shrunk to the same size as Nahura.

“Squeal? *(How is this, Routa? Am I not adorable even when small?)*”

Um, well, no doubt this smaller form is cuter. You’re like a tiny lion—well, I guess that makes you basically a cat, right?

“Squeal, squeal. *(Routa, thou art quite skilled in the art of flattery. I ask thy favor for all eternity.)*”

The conversation seems to be heading off without me. Feels pretty familiar, if you ask me.

I glance to the side. Len is trembling.

And then she screams.

“GA-GAROOON!! *(Th-this creature has taken my spot!!)*”

“Meow, meow! *(She’s taken mine, toooooooooooooo! I’m supposed to be the cat!)*”

For both of them, a powerful rival has appeared...

Is that the headline here?

Afterword

Good morning, evening, and afternoon, woof! It's been a while! Five months, to be exact!

A five-month gap in a light novel series? Someone works slow. What's going on?

There was a five-month gap before the fifth volume, too. Seriously, what's the deal?

The cause is entirely how slowly I write. I'm sorry, I'm sorry! (Grovels in thirty-two directions.)

But thanks to all your support, another volume managed to get published. Thank you, thank you! (Grovels in thirty-two directions.)

Right now (at the end of July) the rainy season has finally ended, and as someone weak to weather changes, I'm steadily regaining my pep. By the time you all read this book, you might be facing down the harsh lingering heat at the end of the season.

The low air pressure in the rainy season is tough, but you have to be careful about how hot the summer can get, too. Make sure to stay hydrated and spend time in cool places to avoid heat stroke.

Also, with my side job as a cook, I'll probably be making meals in the hellfire of kitchens with the heat on max. (I request we get air conditioners in there.)

Weak to the heat, weak to the cold, catching colds all the time, straining my back again, and getting migraines

constantly. That isn't the kind of author I wanted to become.

As a writer, I'm more of a wreck by the day, but for whatever reason, whenever I have a checkup, the results come back excellent, so all I can do is wonder.

Maybe it's that my mind is too weak, not my body. I guess it's to be expected of the birth parent of Routa, whom everyone recognizes as having no backbone.

I'd like to do like Routa and not work, get spoiled by a nice young lady, and live my days in idleness, eating and sleeping. Just none of the Fenrir body-related trouble, please.

I have one announcement.

The second volume of *Woof Woof Story's* comic adaptation has been released! And thanks to how well it's doing, they even decided it will have a reprint!

Yay! Thank you, thank you, thank you! (Grovels in thirty-two directions—I'm actually doing this, and on the third time, I got dizzy. Am I an idiot?)

The second volume is an adaptation of the first light novel. I think the story of the first novel is nicely split up in a way that makes it a lot more palatable for manga volumes.

You'll be able to enjoy a different side of Routa from the one in the novels, so please give it a try!

Anyway, I'd like to wrap this up with the usual thank-yous.

My editor, K, who keeps getting betrayed by his author saying, "Next time, I promise to write the book on schedule." I'm really, really sorry! (Had to get the apology out of the way at the beginning of the thank-yous.)

To Kochimo, who draws the cool and cute illustrations every time. Thank you so much for depicting Routa as he rapidly becomes a gigantic unknown life-form, along with the charming heroines!

To Koikuchi Kiki, who works on the comic adaptation.

We're turns-in-drafts-late buddies! Yahoo! ...Let's both do our best, next time, not to trouble our respective editors.

To everyone at the editorial department. The designers. The proofreaders. The salesmen. The bookstore workers.

To everyone else I couldn't list here, and you, for purchasing this book—thank you!

I'm looking forward to the day we can meet again! Good-bye!

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